'TILDA JANE

MARSHALL SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF

BEAUTIFUL JOE

PRINCESS SERIES

TILDA JANE

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Marshall Saunders

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L. C. PAGE AND COMPANY

New England Building, Boston, Mass.

"SHE SPELLED OUT THE INFORMATION, 'I AM AN ORPHAN.'"

(*See page 80*

PRINCESS SERIES

'TILDA JANE

By

MARSHALL SAUNDERS

Author of "Beautiful Joe," "Beautiful Joe's Paradise," "The Story of the Gravelys," etc.

Illustrated by

CLIFFORD CARLETON

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I DEDICATE THIS STORY TO

EMILE HUGUENIN, JEAN BRUN,
GERALD MUIR, SANFORD ROTHENBURG,
HARRY KRUGER, MAUGHS BROWN,
AND
ROBBIE MACLEAN,

BOYS OF BELMONT SCHOOL WHO USED TO GATHER ROUND ME
ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS AND BEG FOR A MANUSCRIPT
READING OF THE TRIALS OF MY ORPHAN
IN SEARCH OF A HOME.

Owing to the exigencies of serial publication, the story of "'Tilda Jane," as it appeared in The Youth's Companion, was somewhat condensed. In the present version the omitted portions have been restored, and the story published in its original form.

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'TILDA JANE.

CHAPTER I.

A CREAMERY SHARK.

THE crows had come back. With the fashionables of Maine they had gone south for the winter, but now on the third day of March the advance guard of the solemn, black army soared in sight.

They were cawing over the green pine woods of North Marsden, they were cawing over the black spruces of South Marsden, and in Middle Marsden, where the sun had melted the snow on a few exposed knolls, they were having a serious and chattering jubilation over their return to their summer haunts.

"Land! ain't they sweet!" muttered a little girl, who was herself almost as elfish and impish as a crow. She stood with clasped hands in the midst

of a spruce thicket. Her face was upturned to the hot sun set in the hard blue of the sky. The sun burned her, the wind chilled her, but she remained motionless, except when the sound of sleigh-bells was heard. Then she peered eagerly out into the road.

Time after time she returned to her hiding-place with a muttered, "No good!" She allowed a priest to go by, two gossiping women on their way from the village to spend a day in the country, a minister hurrying to the sick-bed of a parishioner, and several loaded wood-sleds, but finally a hilarious jingle drew her hopefully from her retreat.

Her small black eyes screwed themselves into two glittering points as she examined the newcomer.

"He'll do!" she ejaculated; then, with a half-caressing, half-threatening, "You'll get murdered if there's a word out o' you," addressed to an apparent roll of cloth tucked among spruce branches a few feet from the ground, she stepped out by the snake fence.

"Hello, mister!"

The fat young man bobbing over the "thank-you-ma'ams" of the snowy road, pulled himself up with

a jerk in his small sleigh drawn by a long-legged mare.

"Coronation! Where did that noise come from? Hello, wood-lark," as he observed the little girl peeping at him through the fence, "is there a hawk in your nest?"

"Who be you?" she asked.

"I've got an awful pretty name," he replied, flicking his whip over the snow-bank beside him, "too pretty to tell."

"Who be you?" she asked, pertinaciously.

"Ever hear tell of a creamery shark?"

"I didn't know as sharks favoured cream," she said, soberly.

"They dote on it."

"Be you a creamery shark?"

"No — course not. I'm chasing one. I'm a farmer."

The small, keen-eyed girl looked him all over. He was the creamery shark himself, and he certainly had an oily, greasy appearance befitting his fondness for cream. However, she did not care what he was if he served her purpose.

"Will you gimme a lift?' she asked.

"A lift — where?"

"Anywhere out o' this," and she pointed back to the smart, white village up the river.

"Now what be you?" he said, cunningly.

"I be a runaway."

"What you running from?"

"I'm a-runnin' from an orphan 'sylum."

"Good for you — where you going?"

"I'm goin' to Orstralia."

"Better for you — what you going there for?"

"'Cause," she said, firmly, "they know how to treat orphans there. They don't shut 'em up together like a lot o' sick pigs. They scatter 'em in families. The gover'ment pays their keep till they get old enough to fend for themselves. Then they gets a sum o' money an' they works — I heard a lady-board readin' it in a newspaper."

"A lady-board?"

"Yes — lady-boards has to run 'sylums."

"Course they do. Well, skip in, little un."

"'WELL, I VUM!'"

"There's another passenger," she said, firmly; "an' them as takes me takes him."

"Have you got your granddaddy along?"

"No, siree, but I've got somethin' mos' as good as a granddaddy, an' I'd thank you to keep a straight tongue when you speak of him."

The young man put the offending tongue in his cheek, and chuckled enjoyably as the small, elfish figure disappeared in the wood. Presently she returned with a good-sized bundle in her arms, that she thrust through the fence.

"Give it a name," said the young man; "why, see how it's wiggling — must be some kind of an animal. Cat, weasel, rabbit, hen, dog —"

"Stop there," she ejaculated; "let it be dog. His name's Gippie."

"Well, I vum!" the young man said, good-naturedly, as she approached the sleigh and deposited her beshawled dog on his knees.

"I guess this sleigh warn't built for two," she said, as she crawled in beside him.

"Right you are; but you don't want to be carted far."

"Gimme that dog," she said, taking the bundle, "an' start off. Prob'ly they're just hitchin' up to be after me."

He clicked his tongue to the long-legged mare, and speedily fences and trees began to fly by them.

"What did you twig me for?" asked the fat young man. "Ain't you had no other chance?"

"Lots," she said, briefly.

"There was an ole boy ahead o' me with a two-seated rig, an' a youngster on the back seat. Why didn't you freeze on to him?"

She turned her little dark face toward him, a little face overspread by sudden passion. "D'ye know what that ole shell-back would 'a' done?"

"He'd 'a' took ye in."

"He'd 'a' druv me back to that 'sylum. He looked too good, that one. You looked like a baddie."

"Much obliged," he said, dryly.

"I guess you've done bad things," she said, inexorably. "You've stole pies, an' tole lies, an' fed dogs an' cats on the sly. I guess you've been found out."

The fat young man fell into a sudden reverie, and they passed several white fields in silence.

"They'll never ketch me," she said at last, gleefully; "we're goin' like the wind."

The young man looked down at her. She had the appearance of a diminutive witch as she sat with one hand clasping her faded hat, the other holding firmly to the bundle on her lap. Her countenance was so much older and shrewder in some phases than in others that the young man was puzzled to guess her age.

"Why, you ain't got any cloak," he said. "That's nothing but a dress you've got on, ain't it? Take the shawl off that dog."

"No, sir," she said, decidedly, "I don't do that."

"Hold on; I've got a horse blanket here," and he dived under the seat. "There!" and he wrapped it around her shoulders.

"Thanks," she said, briefly, and again her bird-like eyes scanned the road ahead.

"Hot cakes an' syrup!" she exclaimed, in a voice of resigned distress, "there's the North Marsden lady-board comin'. They must have 'phoned her.

Say, mister, lemme sneak under here. If she holes you up, you'll have to tell a lie."

The young man grinned delightedly as the little girl slipped through the blanket and disappeared under the lap-robe. Then he again went skimming over the snow.

There was a very grand sleigh approaching him, with a befurred coachman on the seat driving a pair of roan horses, and behind him a gray-haired lady smothered in handsome robes.

"Please stop!" she called pathetically, to the approaching young man.

The creamery shark pulled up his mare, and blinked thoughtfully at her.

"Oh, have you seen a little girl?" she said excitedly; "a poor little girl, very thin and miserable, and with a lame, brown dog limping after her? She's wandering somewhere — the unfortunate, misguided child. We have had such trouble with her at the Middle Marsden Asylum — the orphan asylum, you know. We have fed her and clothed her, and now she's run away."

The fat young man became preternaturally solemn,

the more so as he heard a low growl somewhere in the region of his feet.

"Did she have black hair as lanky as an Injun's?" he asked.

"Yes, yes."

"And a kind o' sickly green dress?"

"Oh, yes, and a dark complexion."

"And a sort of steely air as if she'd dare the world?"

"That's it; oh, yes, she wasn't afraid of any one."

"Then I've sighted your game," he said, gravely, very gravely, considering that the "game" was pinching one of his legs.

"I'll give you the scent," he went on. "Just follow this road till you come to the three pine-trees at the cross. Then turn toward Spruceville."

"Oh, thank you, thank you. I'm ever so much obliged. But was she on foot or driving?"

"Driving like sixty, sitting up on the seat beside a smooth old farmer with a red wig on, and a face as long as a church."

"A red wig!" exclaimed the lady. "Why, that's Mr. Dabley — he's one of our advisory committee."

"Dabley or Grabley, he's driving with one of your orphans. I see her as plain as day sitting beside him — brown face, faded black hat, sickly green frock, bundle on her lap."

"Farmer Dabley — incredible! How one can be deceived. Drive on, Matthew. We must try to overtake them. Had he one horse or two?"

"A pair, ma'am — a light-legged team — a bay and a cream. He's a regular old sport."

"He's a Mephistopheles if he's helping that child to escape," said the lady, warmly. "I'll give him a piece of my mind."

Her coachman started his horses, and the little girl under the robe was beginning to breathe freely when a shout from the young man brought her heart to her mouth.

"Say, ma'am, was that a striped or a plain shawl she had her dog wrapped in?"

"Striped — she had the impudence to steal it from the matron, and leave a note saying she did it because her jacket was locked up, and she was afraid her dog would freeze — I'm under a great obligation to you, sir."

"No obligation," he said, lifting his hat. "I'm proud to set you on the chase after such a bad young one. That's your girl, ma'am. Her shawl was striped. I didn't tell you she had the nerve to ask me to take her in."

"Not really — did she?" the lady called back; then she added, wonderingly, "but I thought you met her driving with Farmer Dabley?"

They had both turned around, and were talking over their shoulders.

There was a terrible commotion under the lap-robe, and the young man felt that he must be brief.

"If you bark I'll break your neck," he heard the refugee say in a menacing whisper, and, to cover a series of protesting growls, he shouted, lustily, "Yes, ma'am, but first I passed her on foot. Then I turned back, and she was with the farmer. That young one has got the face of a government mule, but I'm used to mules, and when she asked me I said, 'Pears to me, little girl, you favour a runaway, and I ain't got no room for runaways in this narrow rig, 'specially as I'm taking a bundle of clothing to my dear old father' — likewise a young pig," he

added, as there was a decided squeal from between his feet.

"Thank you, thank you," came faintly after him as he started off at a spanking gait, and, "You're badder than I thought you was," came reproachfully from the tumbled head peeping above the lap-robe.

"You're grateful!" he said, ironically.

"I'm bad, but I only asked the Lord to forgive the lies I'd got to tell," said the little girl as she once more established herself on the seat. "You should 'a' said, 'No, ma'am,' I didn't see the little girl' — an' druv on."

"I guess you're kind of mixed in your opinions," he remarked.

"I ain't mixed in my mind. I see things as straight as that air road," she replied. "I said, 'This is a bad business, for I've got to run away, but I'll be as square as I can.'"

She paused suddenly, and her companion asked, "What's up with you?"

"Nothin'," she said, faintly, "only I feel as if there was a rat inside o' me. You ain't got any crackers round, have you?"

"No, but I've got something better," and he drew a flask from the pocket of his big ulster and put it to her mouth.

Her nostrils dilated. "I'm a Loyal Legion girl."

"Loyal Legion — what's that?"

> "Beware of bottles, beware of cups,
> Evil to him who evil sups."

"Oh! a temperance crank," and he laughed. "Well, here's a hunk of cake I put in my pocket last night."

The little girl ate with avidity the section of a rich fruit loaf he handed her.

"How about your dog?" asked the young man.

"Oh, I guess he ain't hungry," she said, putting a morsel against the brown muzzle thrust from the shawl. "Everythin' was locked up last night, an' there warn't enough lunch for him an' me — see, he ain't for it. He knows when hunger stops an' greed begins. That's poetry they taught us."

"Tell us about that place you've been raised. No, stop — you're kind of peaked-looking. Settle

down an' rest yourself till we pull up for dinner. I'll gabble on a bit if you'll give me a starter."

"I guess you favour birds an' things, don't you?" she observed, shrewdly.

"Yaw — do you?"

"Sometimes I think I'm a bird," she said, vehemently, "or a worm or somethin'. If I could 'a' caught one o' them crows this mornin' I'd 'a' hugged it an' kissed it. Ain't they lovely?"

"Well, I don' know about lovely," said the young man, in a judicial manner, "but the crow, as I take him, is a kind of long-suffering orphan among birds. From the minute the farmers turn up these furrows under the snow, the crow works like fury. Grubs just fly down his red throat, and grasshoppers ain't nowhere, but because he now and then lifts a hill o' petetters, and pulls a mite o' corn when it gets toothsome, and makes way once in so often with a fat chicken that's a heap better out o' the world than in it, the farmers is down on him, the Legislature won't protect him, and the crow — man's good friend — gets shot by everybody and everything!"

"I wish I was a queen," said the little girl, passionately.

"Well, sissy, if you ever get to be one, just unmake a few laws that are passed to please the men who have a pull. Here in Maine you might take the bounty off bob-cats, an' let 'em have their few sheep, an' you might stand between the mink and the spawning trout, and if you want to put a check on the robins who make war on the cherries an' strawberries, I guess it would be more sensible than chasing up the crows."

"I'm remarkin' that you don't beat your horse," said his companion, abruptly.

"That mare," said the young man, reflectively, "is as smart as I be, and sometimes I think a thought smarter."

"You wouldn't beat that little dog," she said, holding up her bundle.

"Bet your striped shawl I wouldn't."

"I like you," she said, emphatically. "I guess you ain't as bad as you look."

The young man frowned slightly, and fell into another reverie.

CHAPTER II.

EVEN SHARKS HAVE TENDER HEARTS.

THE old Moss Glen Inn, elm-shaded and half covered by creeping vines, is a favourite resort for travellers in the eastern part of Maine, for there a good dinner can be obtained in a shorter space of time than in any other country hotel in the length and breadth of the State.

"And all because there's a smart woman at the head of it," explained the young man to the little waif beside him. "There she is — always on hand."

A round, good-natured face, crowning a rotund, generous figure, smiled at them from the kitchen window, but while the eyes smiled, the thick, full lips uttered a somewhat different message to a tall, thin woman, bending over the stove.

"Ruth Ann, here's that soapy Hank Dillson round again, — takin' in the farmers, as usual, engagin'

them to pay for machinery and buildings more than are needed, considerin' the number of their cows, an' he's got a washed-out lookin' young one with him. She'll make a breach in the victuals, I guess."

Ruth Ann, who was her sister and helper in household affairs, came and looked over her shoulder, just as Dillson sprang from the sleigh.

Mrs. Minley stepped to the door, and stood bobbing and smiling as he turned to her.

"How de do, Mrs. Minley. Give this little girl a place to lie down till dinner's ready, will you? She's dead beat."

'Tilda Jane walked gravely into the kitchen, and although her head was heavy, and her feet as light as if they were about to waft her to regions above, she took time to scrutinise the broad face that would have been generous but for the deceitful lips, and also to cast a glance at the hard, composed woman at the window, who looked as if her head, including the knob of tightly curled hair at the back, had been carved from flint.

"Step right in this way," said Mrs. Minley, bustling into a small bedroom on the ground floor.

'Tilda Jane was not used to being waited on, and for one proud moment she wished that the children in the orphan asylum could see her. Then a feeling of danger and insecurity overcame her, and she sank on one of the painted, wooden chairs.

"You're done out," said Mrs. Minley, sympathetically. "Are you a relation of Mr. Dillson's?"

"No, I ain't."

"You can lie on that bed if you like," said Mrs. Minley, noticing the longing glance cast at it.

"Well, I guess I will," said 'Tilda Jane, placing her bundle on a chair, and stooping down to unloose her shoes.

"Stop till I get some newspapers to put on the bed," said the landlady — "what's in that package? It's moving," and she stared at the shawl.

"It's a dog."

"Mercy me! I don't allow no dogs in my house."

"All right," said the little girl, patiently putting on her shoes again.

"What you going to do, child?"

"I'm goin' to the wood-shed. Them as won't have my dog won't have me."

"Land sakes, child, stay where you be! I guess he can't do no harm if you'll watch him."

"No ma'am, he'll not rampage. He's little, an' he's ole, an' he's lame, an' he don't care much for walkin'. Sometimes you'll hear nothin' out o' him all day but a growl or a snap."

The landlady drew away from the bundle, and after she had seen the tired head laid on the pillow, she softly closed the door of the room.

In two minutes 'Tilda Jane was asleep. The night before she had not dared to sleep. To-day, under the protection of the creamery shark, she could take her rest, her hunger satisfied by the cake he had given her in the sleigh. The shark crept in once to look at her. "Ain't she a sight?" he whispered to Mrs. Minley, who accompanied him, "a half-starved monkey."

She playfully made a thrust at his ribs. "Oh, go 'long with you — always making your jokes! How can a child look like a monkey?"

He smiled, well pleased at her cajoling tone, then,

stretching himself out in an armchair, he announced that dinner must be postponed for an hour to let the child have her sleep out.

Mrs. Minley kept a pleasant face before him, but gave vent to some suppressed grumbling in the kitchen. With fortitude remarkable in a hungry man, he waited until one o'clock, then, losing patience, he ate his dinner, and, telling Mrs. Minley that he had business in the neighbourhood, and would not be back until supper-time, he drove away in his sleigh.

At six o'clock 'Tilda Jane felt herself gently shaken, and opening her eyes, she started up in alarm.

"All right — 'tain't the police," said Mrs. Minley. "I know all about you, little girl. You needn't be scared o' me. Get up and have a bite of supper. Mr. Dillson's going away, and he wants to see you."

'Tilda Jane rose and put on her shoes in silence. Then she followed the landlady to the next room. For an instant she staggered back. She had never before seen such a huge, open fireplace, never had had such a picture presented to her in the steam-

heated orphanage. Fresh from troubled dreams, it seemed as if these logs were giants' bodies laid crosswise. The red flames were from their blood that was being licked up against the sooty stones. Then the ghastliness vanished, and she approvingly took in the picture, — the fat young creamery shark standing over the white cat and rubbing her with his toe, the firelight on the wall and snowy table, and the big lamp on the mantel.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, turning around, "did you make your sleep out?"

"Yes sir," she said, briefly. "Where shall I put this dog?"

"Don't put him nowhere till we turn this cat out. Scat, pussy!" and with his foot he gently assisted the small animal kitchenwards.

"Now you can roast your pup here," he said, pointing to the vacated corner.

"Don't touch him," warned 'Tilda Jane, putting aside his outstretched hand. "He nips worse'n a lobster."

"Fine dog that," said the young man, ironically.

"Come on now, let's fall to. I guess that rat's rampaging again."

"Yes, he's pretty bad," said 'Tilda Jane, demurely; and she seated herself in the place indicated.

Mrs. Minley waited on them herself, and, as she passed to and fro between the dining-room and kitchen, she bestowed many glances on the lean, lank, little girl with the brown face.

After a time she nudged Hank with her elbow. "Look at her!"

Hank withdrew his attention for a minute from his plate to cast a glance at the downcast head opposite. Then he dropped his knife and fork. "Look here! I call this kind of low-down."

'Tilda Jane raised her moist eyes.

"You've got ham and eggs; fried petetters and toast, and two kinds of preserve, and hot rolls and coffee, and cake and doughnuts, which is more'n you ever got at the asylum, I'll warrant, and yet you're crying, — and after all the trouble you've been to me. There's no satisfying some people."

'Tilda Jane wiped her eyes. "I ain't a-cryin' for the 'sylum," she said, stolidly.

"Then what are you crying for?"

"I'm cryin' 'cause it's such a long way to Orstralia, an' I don't know no one. I wish you was a-goin'."

"I wish I was, but I ain't. Come on now, eat your supper."

"I suppose I be a fool," she muttered, picking up her knife and fork. "I've often heard I was."

"Hi now — I guess you feel better, don't you?" said the young man, twenty minutes later.

He was in excellent humour himself, and, sitting tilted back in his chair by the fireplace, played a tune on his big white teeth with a toothpick.

"Yes, I guess I'm better," said 'Tilda Jane, soberly. "That was a good supper."

"Hadn't you better feed your pup?" asked the young man. "Seems to me he must be dead, he's so quiet."

"He's plumb beat out, I guess," said the little girl, and she carefully removed the dog's queer drapery.

A little, thin, old, brown cur staggered out, with

lips viciously rolled back, and a curious unsteadiness of gait.

"Steady, old boy," said the young man; "my soul and body, he ain't got but three legs! Whoa —you're running into the table."

"He don't see very well," said 'Tilda Jane, firmly. "His eyes is poor."

"What's the matter with his tail? It don't seem to be hung on right."

"It wobbles from having tin cans tied to it. Gippie dear, here's a bone."

"Gippie dear," muttered the young man. "I'd shoot him if he was my dog."

"If that dog died, I'd die," said the little girl, passionately.

"We've got to keep him alive, then," said the young man, good-humouredly. "Can't you give him some milk?"

She poured out a saucer full and set it before him. The partially blind dog snapped at the saucer, snapped at her fingers until he smelled them and discovered whose they were, then he finally condescended to lick out the saucer.

"And you like that thing?" said the young man, curiously.

"Like him! — I love him," said 'Tilda Jane, affectionately stroking the brown, ugly back.

"And when did he give away that leg?"

She shook her head. "It's long to tell. I guess you'd ask me to shut up afore I got through."

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF HER LIFE.

THE young man said nothing more at the time, but ten minutes later, when he was thoughtfully smoking a long brown pipe, and 'Tilda Jane sat in a chair beside him, rocking her dog, he called out to Mrs. Minley, who was hovering about the room. "Sit down, Mrs. Minley. P'raps you can get this little girl to talk; I can't."

'Tilda Jane turned sharply to him. "Oh, mister, I'd do anything for you. I'll talk."

"Well, reel it off then. I've got to start soon."

"What d'ye want to know?" she said, doggedly.

"Everything; tell me where you started from. Was you born in the asylum?"

"Nobody don't know where I was born. Nobody don't know who I am, 'cept that a woman come to the poorhouse with me to Middle Marsden when I was a baby. She died, an' I was left. They give

me the name of 'Tilda Jane Harper, an' put me in the 'sylum. Children come an' went. Just as soon as I'd get to like 'em they'd be 'dopted; I never was 'dopted, 'cause I'm so ugly. My eyes ought to 'a' been blue, an' my hair curly. I might 'a' been a servant, but my habits was in the way."

"Habits — what habits?" asked Hank.

"Habits of impidence an' pig-headedness. When the men come to kill the pigs I'd shut myself in my room, an' put my fingers in my ears, an' I couldn't hear, but I'd always squeal when the pigs squealed."

"Is that why you wouldn't eat your ham just now?"

"Oh, that ain't ham to me," she said, eloquently. "That bit o' red meat was a cunnin', teeny white pig runnin' round a pen, cryin' 'cause the butcher's after him. I couldn't eat it, any more'n I'd eat my brother."

"You're a queer little kite," interjected the young man, and he exchanged an amused glance with Mrs. Minley, who was swaying gently back and forth in a rocking-chair.

"So you wasn't very much set up at the asylum?" he went on.

"I guess I'm too bad for a 'sylum. Onct our washerwoman took me home to supper. I guess heaven must be like that. They had a cat, too. I used to get in most trouble at the 'sylum 'bout cats. When starvin' ones came rubbin' up agin me in the garden, I couldn't help sneakin' them a bit o' bread from the pantry. It beats all, how cats find out people as likes 'em. Then I'd get jerked up."

"Jerked up?" repeated her interlocutor.

"Locked in my room, or have my hands slapped. Onct I took a snake in the house. He was cold, but he got away from me, an' the matron found him in her bed. She whipped me that time."

"Was that what made you run away?"

"No, I run away on account o' this dog. You call up the cold spell we had a week ago?"

"You bet — I was out in it."

"Well, there come the coldest night. The matron give us extry blankets, but I couldn't sleep. I woke up in the middle o' the night, an' I thought o' that dog out in the stable. 'He'll freeze,' I said, an'

when I said it, it seemed as if icicles were stickin' into me. I was mos' crazy. I got up an' looked out the window. There was a moon, an awful bitin', ugly kind of a moon grinnin' at me. I put on some clo'es, I slipped down-stairs, an' it seemed as if everythin' was yellin' in the cold. Every board an' every wall I touched went off like a gun, but no one woke, an' I got out in the stable.

"The horse was warm an' so was the cow, but this little dog was mos' froze. I tried to warm him, but my fingers got like sticks. Then I did a scand'lous thing. I says, 'I'll take him in bed with me an' warm him for a spell, an' no one'll know;' so I lugged him in the house, an' he cuddled down on my arm just so cunnin'. Then I tried to stay awake, so I could carry him out early in the mornin', but didn't I fall to sleep, an' the first thing I knowed there was the matron a-spearin' me with her eyes, an she put out her hand to ketch the dog, an' he up an' bit her, an' then there was trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" asked the young man.

"I had bread an' water for two days, an' the dog was shut up in the stable, an' then I was brought up before the lady-board."

"The lady-board," murmured Mrs. Minley; "what does the child mean?"

"The board of lady managers," explained Dillson.

"Tell us about it," he said to 'Tilda Jane.

The latter was keeping an eye on the clock. She knew that the time must soon come for her to part from her new-found friend. It was not in her nature to be very demonstrative, yet she could not altogether hide a certain feverishness and anxiety. One thing, however, she could do, and she subdued her emotion in order to do it. It amused the young man to hear her talk. She would suppress her natural inclination to silence and gravity, and try to entertain him. And the more she talked, possibly the longer he would stay.

Therefore she went on: "There they set round the table as big an' handsome as so many pies. One lady was at the top, an' she rapped on the table with a little hammer, an' said, 'Tention, ladies!' Then she says, 'Here is the 'fortinate object of dissection.

What part shall we tackle fust? Name your wishes, ladies.' Then she stopped an' another lady begun, 'Mam pressiding, stake the case.'"

The young man took his pipe from his mouth, and Mrs. Minley ejaculated, "Mercy me!"

"Madam president, I guess," he said, gravely. "Go on, sissy."

'Tilda Jane went on, still with her eye on the clock, and still speaking feverishly. "The mam pressiding staked me out. Says she, 'Here is a little girl — she come to us like a lily o' the field; no dress on, no bunnit, no nothin'. We've fed an' clothed the lily, an' guv her good advice, an' she's lifted up her heel agin us. She deifies us, she introjuces toads an' snakes into the sacred presings of our sinningcherry for orphans. She packs a dirty dog in bed. We'll never levelate her. She's lowering the key of our 'stution. She knows not the place of reptiles an' quadruples. Ladies, shall we keep this little disturving lellement in our 'stution? If thy hand 'fend against thee cut it off. If thy foot straggle, treat it likewise.'

"Then she set down, an' another lady got up.

Says she, 'I'm always for mercy — strained mercy dropping like juice from heaven. If this little girl is turned inside out, she'll be a bright an' shinin' light. I prepose that we make the 'speriment. The tastes is in her, but we can nip off the grati'cations. I remove that instead of disturving her, we disturve the animiles. Ladies, we has hard work to run this 'stution.'"

"This 'stution?" said the young man.

"Yes, 'stution," repeated 'Tilda Jane, "that's what they call the 'sylum. Well, this lady went on an' says she, 'Let's send away the cats an' dogs an' all the children's pets — squirrels an' pigeons an' rabbits, 'cause this little girl's disruptin' every child on the place. Onct when cats come an' other animiles, they was stoned away. Now they're took in. I come across one little feller jus' now, an' instead o' learnin' his lesson he was playin' with a beetle. Ticklin' it with a straw, ladies. Now ain't that awful? We've got 'sponsibilities toward these foun'lings. I feels like a mother. If we sends 'em foolish out in the world we'll be blamed. Our faithful matron says it's unpossible to ketch rats an'

mice. This little girl gets at the traps, an' let's 'em go. She's a born rule-smasher!'

"Then she closed her mouth an' set down, an' the big lady sittin' at the head o' the table pounded her hammer 'cause they all fell to jabberin'. Says she, 'Will some lady make a commotion?' Then one lady got up, an' she says, 'I remove that all animiles be decharged from this 'stution.'

"'What about the chickings?' called out another lady. 'You must declude them. This will go on record.' The other lady said, ''Scuse me, I forgot the chickings. I'll mend my dissolution. I remove that all quadruples be decharged from this 'stution.'

"That suited some, an' didn't suit t'others, an' there was a kind of chally-vally. One lady said she's mend the mendment, an' then the mam pressiding got kind o' mixy-maxy, an' said they'd better start all over agin, 'cause she'd lose her way 'mong so many mendments. After a long time, they got their ideas sot, an' they said that I was to stay, but all the animiles was to go. I didn't snuffle nor nothin', but I just said, 'Are you plannin' to kill that there dog?'

"The mam pressiding gave a squeal an' said, 'No, that would be cruel. They would give the dog to some little feller who would be good to him.' I said, 'Little fellers tie tin cans to dogs' tails'—an' then they got mad with me an' said I was trespicious. Then I said, 'All right,' 'cause what could I do agin a whole lot o' lady-boards? But I madê up my mind I'd have to work my way out of it, 'cause it would kill that little dog to be took from me. So I run away."

Her story was done, and, closing her lips in dogged resolution, she stared inquiringly at the young man. He was not going to withdraw his protection from her, she saw that, but what would he direct her to do next?

He was thoughtfully tapping his pipe against the fireplace, now he was putting it in his pocket, and now he was going to speak.

"Little girl, you've started for Australia, and as I don't believe in checking a raring, tearing ambition, I won't try to block you, exactly, but only to side-track. You can't go to Australia bang off. It's too far. And you haven't got the funds. Now I'll make a proposition. I've got an old father 'most as cranky

"'TILDA JANE SAT LIKE A STATUE."

as that there dog. I guess if you're so long-suffering with the animal, you'll be long-suffering with the human. He needs some tidy body to keep his house trigged up, and to wait on him, 'cause he's lame. He has an everlasting wrastle to keep a housekeeper on account of this same flash-light temper. But I guess from what I've seen of you, that you could fix him. And you'd have a home which you seem to hanker for. And you could save your money and start for Australia when you've put enough flesh on those bones to keep you from blowing away into the sea and getting lost. Starting would be convenient, for my father lives near the big Canadian railway that is a round the world route. You can step aboard the cars, go to the Pacific, board a steamer, and go on your way to Australia. What do you say — is it a bargain?"

'Tilda Jane sat like a statue. The firelight danced behind her little, grave profile that remained unchanged, save for the big tears rolling slowly and deliberately down each thin cheek and dropping on the faded dress. Only the tears and the frantically clasped hands betrayed emotion.

"I guess it's a go," said the young man, kindly. "Here's my father's address," and getting up he handed a card to her. "Hobart Dillson, Ciscasset, Maine. I've got to make tracks now, but Mrs. Minley here will put you on a train that comes by here in the morning, and all you've got to do is to sit still in it, till you hear the conductor holler Ciscasset. Then you hustle out and ask some one where Hobart Dillson lives. When you get there, don't shake if he throws a crutch at you. Just tell him you've come to stay, and I'm going to pay extra for it. That'll cool him, 'cause he's had to pay a housekeeper out of his own allowance up to this. The old boy and I don't rub along together very sweet, but he knows the size of a dollar every time."

'Tilda Jane choked back the suffocating lump in her throat, and gravely rose to her feet. "Sir, I'm as much obleeged to you as —"

Here she broke down.

"As you ought to be," he finished. "Don't mention it. I'm happy to make your acquaintance. So long," and he politely held out two fingers.

A vague terror seized the little girl. He had arranged everything for her, and yet she had never since her escape felt so paralysed with fear. Her beseeching eyes sought Mrs. Minley's face. The landlady was smiling graciously at her, but the little girl's heart sunk. Quite unknown to herself, she was a sharp reader of character. She was losing her best friend in the fat young man.

"Take me with you," she gasped, suddenly clinging to his hand.

"Can't do that, sissy. I'm going back into the settlements — bad roads, scattered houses. You'd freeze stiff. Better stay here with Mrs. Minley. I'll run up to Ciscasset by and by to see you."

'Tilda Jane drew back in sudden, steely composure. She was ashamed of herself. "I'm crazy," she said, shortly; "you've done enough for me now. I'll take care of your father if he gets mad fifty times a day."

Already she felt a sense of responsibility. She drew herself up with dignity, and in sad, composed silence watched the young man leave the room and the house. When the last faint sound of his sleigh-

bells had died away, she gave up her listening attitude, and turned patiently to Mrs. Minley, who was saying with a yawn, "I guess you'd better go to bed."

'Tilda Jane walked obediently toward her room, and Mrs. Minley, seating herself on a chair in cold curiosity, watched her undress.

When the little girl knelt down to say her prayers, a feeble smile illuminated the woman's face. However, she was still listless and uninterested, until the latter portion of the petition.

"O Lord," 'Tilda Jane was praying earnestly, almost passionately, "forgive me for all this sin an' 'niquity. I just had to run away. I couldn't give up that little dog that thou didst send me. I'll live square as soon as I get takin' care o' that ole man. Bless the matron an' make her forgive me, an' bless all the lady-boards — Mis' Grannis 'specially, 'cause she'll be maddest with me. Keep me from tellin' any more lies. Amen."

When 'Tilda Jane rose from her knees, Mrs. Minley's breath was coming and going quickly, and there was a curious light in her eyes. "Mrs.

Grannis, did you say?" she asked, shortly. "Mrs. Grannis, over Beaver Dam way?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What has she got to do with the asylum?"

"She's the fust lady-board. She sits behind the table an' pounds the hammer."

"And she'll be maddest with you?"

"Yes, ma'am. She says children has too much liberties."

"Hurry into bed," said Mrs. Minley, briefly, and taking up the lamp, and without a word of farewell, she disappeared from the room.

'Tilda Jane cowered down between the cold sheets. Then she stretched out a hand to touch the precious bundle on the chair by her bed. And then she tried to go to sleep, but sleep would not come.

CHAPTER IV.

UNSTABLE AS WATER.

A VAGUE uneasiness possessed her. Ah, how happy would she be, could she know that the young creamery man was sleeping under the same roof! But he was speeding somewhere far away over the snowy roads. However, she should see him again. He had said so, and, with the hopefulness of youth, she sighed a happy sigh and, closing her eyes tightly, listened to the various sounds about the quiet house.

There must have been another arrival, for she heard doors opening and shutting, and also the jingle of sleigh-bells. They were strangely confused in her mind with the ringing of the rising-bell at the orphan asylum, and she was just sinking into a dreamy condition, a forerunner of sleep, when she heard a hard voice in her ear.

"Get up an' dress, little girl."

She raised herself quietly from the pillow. There

stood over her the tall, gaunt woman whom she had heard Mrs. Minley address as Ruth Ann. To her perturbed mind, there rose a vision of a graven image from the Bible, as she stared at the woman's stony countenance. She was standing shading a candle with her hand, and her deep eyes were fixed in unmistakable compassion on the little girl.

"Jump up," she repeated, "an' dress like sixty. You've got yourself into a peck o' trouble."

'Tilda Jane had not a thought of questioning the wisdom of this command. Something about the hard-faced woman inspired her with confidence, and without a word she stepped out of bed, and began rapidly putting on her clothes.

"I'll talk while you dress," said the woman, in a hard, intense voice, and putting down the candle, "but, Lord, how can I say it all?"

There was a kind of desperation in her tone, although no trace of emotion appeared on her face. 'Tilda Jane felt a strange kinship with this reserved woman, and flashed her a sympathetic glance while buttoning one of her stout and ugly garments.

Ruth Ann made a brief grimace. "Here I am,"

she said, with a sudden burst of speech, "a middle-aged woman gettin' old. You're a young one settin' out on life's journey. I'll never see you agin, prob'bly. Let me give you a word — be honest, an' if you can't be honest, be as honest as you can. You'll have no luck otherwise. You may think you're havin' luck in bein' sly, but it's a kind o' luck that turns to loss in the long run. There's that sister o' mine. She reminds me o' Reuben in the Bible — 'unstable as water thou shalt not excel.' She's that deceitful that I should think she'd choke with it so she couldn't breathe."

'Tilda Jane made no remark, but as she threw her dress over her head her two black eyes scintillated wonderingly in the woman's direction.

"Unstable," said Ruth Ann, bitterly. "I'd 'a' loved her if she'd been honest, but it's always the same, — fair to the face, foul behind the back. I've slaved for her an' waited on her, an' heard her praised for work I've done and seen young men oggle her, an' she oggle back, an' I've never had an offer an' never will, an' sometimes I think I hate her."

'Tilda Jane paused for an instant in her rapid dressing. This sisterly repulsion was something unknown to her childish experience.

"Then when she gets sick from stuffin' herself, I'm feared, an' think she's goin' to die, but she'll 'tend my funeral, an' cry an' look so handsome that some ole Jack will pop the question on the way home. Here, child, eat these while you dress," and she drew some doughnuts from her pocket.

'Tilda Jane pushed them from her, with an involuntary movement of dislike.

"You've turned agin me for turnin' agin my sister," said the woman, bitterly. "Wait till you're treated as I am. An' let me tell you what she's done to you. You made mention o' Mis' Grannis. Mis' Grannis has got a mortgage on this house. Mis' Grannis lends her money, Mis' Grannis is the god my sister bows down to. Do you think she'd let you stand between her and Mis' Grannis? No — the minute she heard you say Mis' Grannis would be pleased to git you back, that minute she made up her mind to fool you and Hank Dillson that she can't abide 'cause he ain't never asked

her to stop bein' a widow. So she made me help her hitch up, an' she's off on the wings of the wind to tell her sweet Mis' Grannis to come an' git you; an' just to fool her who is so cute at foolin' other folks, I made up my mind to git you off. Now do you take it in?"

'Tilda Jane did take in this alarming bit of news, and for one instant stood aghast. Then she resolutely fell to lacing on her shoes.

"You're gritty," said the woman, admiringly. "Now I'll tell you what I've laid out. I'm goin' to guide you through the woods to the Moss Glen Station. When we git mos' there, I'll skedaddle home an' to bed, 'cause I don't want sister to find me out. Here's an extry pair o' stockin's an' shoes to put on before you board the train. You'll git yours full o' snow water. If all goes as I calc'late, you'll have time to change 'em in the station. You don't want to git sick so you can't stand up to that ole man. Here's a little tippet for your shoulders. Dillson told sister to give you a shawl, but she'll not do it. An' he paid her, too. Now come, let's start."

'Tilda Jane brushed her hand over her eyes, resolutely picked up her dog, and followed her guide out to the kitchen.

Ruth Ann caught up a shawl, threw it over her head, and opened the door. "My — it's black! I guess we'll have to take a lantern."

She turned back, fumbled in a corner of the kitchen, struck a light, then rejoined 'Tilda Jane.

For some minutes they plodded on in silence. Then Ruth Ann said, anxiously, "I don' know what I'll do if it don't snow. She'll track us sure — me, big feet, an' you, smaller ones. Glory, it's snowin' now!"

A sudden wind had sprung up in the black, quiet night, and whirled a few flakes of snow in their faces. Then the snow began to fall from above, gently and quietly, flake by flake.

'Tilda Jane struggled along the heavy road in the wake of the tall woman ahead. The small dog seemed to have grown larger, and lay a heavy burden in her arms. Yet she uttered no word of complaint. Her mind was in a whirl, and she gave no thought to physical fatigue. What was she

doing? Had she — a little girl — any right to give so much trouble to grown people? Her actions were exactly in opposition to every precept that had been instilled into her mind. Children should be seen and not heard. Children should wait on grown people. Children must not lie under any circumstances. They must be obedient, truthful, honest, and uncomplaining. Perhaps she ought to go back to the orphan asylum. She could stand punishment herself — but her dog? They would make her give him up. Some boy would get him. Boys were all mischievous at times. Could she endure the thought of that little feeble frame subjected to torture? She could not, and steeling her heart against the asylum, the matron, and the lady managers, she walked on more quickly than ever.

She would never forget that ghostly walk through the woods. The narrow way wound always between high snow-laden sentinels of trees. The sickly, slanting gleam of the lantern lighted only a few steps ahead. Mystery and solemnity were all about her; the pure and exquisite snow, on which they

were putting their black-shod feet, was to her the trailing robe of an angel who had gone before. The large, flat snowflakes, showered on her erring head, were missives from the skies, "Go back, little girl, go back."

"Lord, I can't go back," she repeated, stubbornly, "but I'll repent some more, by and by. Please take away the sick feeling in the middle of my stomach. I can't enjoy anythin'."

The sick feeling continued, and she gave Ruth Ann only a feeble "yes," when she suddenly turned and threw the light of the lantern on her with a brisk, "Don't you want to know what lie I'm goin' to tell 'bout your leavin'?

"I'm not goin' to tell any lie," Ruth Ann continued, triumphantly. "If you've got grace enough to hold your tongue, other folks'll do all your lyin' for you. Sister'll come home, Mis' Grannis with her, prob'bly. They'll go ravagin' in the spare room. They'll come ravagin' out — 'Ruth Ann, that young one's run off!' An' I'll be busy with my pots an' pans, an' all I'll have to say is: 'Do tell!' or, 'Why, how you talk!' An' sister'll

rave an' tear, an' run round like a crazy thing, an' look at Mis' Grannis out o' the corner of her eye."

Ruth Ann's shoulders shook with enjoyable laughter, but if she had turned suddenly she would have seen a look of unmistakable disgust flitting over the face behind her.

She did turn suddenly a few minutes later, but the look was gone. "Here, give me that dog," she said, peremptorily.

The little girl protested, but the woman took him, and again they plodded on in silence.

"Here we be," she said, after they had been walking for an hour longer.

'Tilda Jane raised her head. The narrow road had abruptly expanded into a circular clearing, and in the midst of the clearing stood a small wooden building.

Ruth Ann walked up to it, handed 'Tilda Jane the dog and the lantern, and put her hands on one of the diminutive windows.

It opened easily, and she ejaculated with satisfaction, "Just what I thought. Come, crawl in here; the station agent's been here all the evenin', an' the fire ain't quite out. You'll be as snug as a bug in a

rug. He'll be back at daylight agin, an' soon after your train'll come along for Ciscasset. Don't you breathe a word to him 'bout me. Say Mis' Minley brought you here, if he asks anythin'. Here's enough money to buy your ticket. I ain't got much. Sister keeps me short, an' she's took away with her what Hank Dillson give her for you. Mind an' keep that card with his father's name pinned inside your dress. Here's a lunch," and she produced a parcel from her pocket. "Don't fret, sister can't git home much before breakfast, an' by that time you'll be in Ciscasset, an' I guess they'll not follow you there. She don't know the name o' the place, anyway. She didn't take no 'count when Hank mentioned it, an' when she asked me, you'd better believe I forgot it, too."

'Tilda Jane scrambled through the window, and, upon arriving inside, turned around and gravely shook hands with her guide. "I guess I sha'n't forgit this."

"Don't you take no pains to remember it before sister," said the woman, with a chuckle, "if you don't want me to live an' die in hot water. Good luck to you. Shut the winder, an' put a stick on the fire," and she strode off through the snow.

'Tilda Jane shuddered. She was not a nervous child, yet the knowledge that she was alone in a forest pressed and bore down upon her. However, she was out of the increasing storm. She had got her guilty feet off that angel's trailing robe, and the little letters from heaven were not dashing in her face, nor was there any danger now that one of the groaning trees bending to lament over her would fall and crush her shrinking form.

They were creaking all around the circular opening — those spying trees — staring through the curtainless windows at her, and instead of throwing on more wood, and making a blaze that would enable her to be plainly seen, she opened the stove door, and, cowering over the embers, changed her wet foot-gear, and tried to dry her clinging skirts.

She was entirely miserable until the frightened dog crept into her arms. Here was something weaker and more in need of protection than herself, and, hugging him closely to her, she prepared to spend the rest of the night in a patient waiting for the morning.

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER ADVENTURE.

THE quietest and most undemonstrative passenger on the night train from Boston was the shabby little girl in the corner, with the bundle beside her on the seat.

The conductor, after one sharp glance, paid no attention to her, the brakemen paid no attention to her, the boy with the gum-drops and novels ignored her. She had the air of knowing where she was going, and also of being utterly uninteresting, and greatly to her relief she was left entirely to her own devices.

In reality 'Tilda Jane was in a state of semi-paralysis. She scarcely dared to move, to breathe. All her life had been spent in the quiet precincts of the asylum. She had scarcely been allowed to go to the small village in its vicinity, and when she had been allowed to visit it she had seen nothing as wonderful

as this, for there was no railway there. It took her breath away to be whirled along at so rapid a rate. She wondered how the people dared to walk about. She wondered how she had ever had courage enough to step on board the flaming, roaring monster that had come rushing out of the woods as if it would devour the little station, the agent, herself, and her dog. But they had not been devoured, and the agent had guided her staggering footsteps toward the monster. If he had not done so, she would in her bewilderment have been left a prey for the pitiless Mrs. Minley.

For two hours she sat with swimming brain, then it occurred to her that she must in some way acquaint this wonderful and frightful means of locomotion, with her desire to alight at her destination. She closely watched the people entering and leaving the car, and discovered that immediately following the entrance of a man who bawled some unintelligible exclamation, something took place that reminded her of a game played at the asylum. Certain people went out, and certain others came in and took their places. She must catch this noisy man and speak to him.

She patiently waited for him to pass through the car. Once he swept by her, and then some time elapsed before she saw him again. The train had been waiting for fifteen minutes at a station. A number of men had gone out, and presently come back brushing their moustaches and with toothpicks between their teeth. This must be an eating-place; and Ruth Ann said that 'Tilda Jane would arrive in Ciscasset before breakfast-time.

The little girl desperately addressed a passenger passing her. "I say, sir, when do we come to Ciscasset?"

"Ciscasset!" repeated the man. "We passed it an hour ago."

"Passed it!" she echoed, stupidly.

The man turned to a news agent sauntering by. "Here, you, send the conductor here."

The conductor did not appear, but a brakeman came. "Got carried beyond your station, little girl. You're in Canada now, but it's all right; we'll ship you off at the next stop. Number eight will take you back. All ri-i-i-ght."

'Tilda Jane fell back on her seat with a strange

sinking of heart. She remembered now that Hank Dillson had said the conductor would "holler" Ciscasset; but, if he had done so, she had not distinguished the words in the strange sounds issuing from his mouth.

It seemed as if only a few bewildered minutes had passed when some one ejaculated, "McAdam Junction!" and the friendly brakeman was beside her. She felt herself lifted from her seat, bundle and all, and swung to a platform, where she stood among a group of people. She did not know where to go or what to do, and remained as one in a dream until some one touched her shoulder.

"You the little girl carried beyond your station?"

"Yes, sir," she gasped, and looked up into the pleasant face of a young man bending over her.

"All right; the conductor told me about you. Come in here," and he led the way to a waiting-room. "Had your breakfast?"

"No, sir, but I've got it here," and she pulled Ruth Ann's parcel out of her pocket.

The young man smiled and motioned it back. "Come have some hot coffee," and he passed

through a doorway into an eating-room, where 'Tilda Jane presently found herself seated before a steaming cup of coffee, and a plate of beefsteak and potatoes.

"I ain't got any money to pay for this," she said, bluntly, to the young woman who set the tempting viands before her.

"That's all right," said the girl, smiling.

'Tilda Jane picked up her knife and fork. "All right!" seemed to be a railway expression. It was immensely comforting to her, and she soberly partook of the hot breakfast, drank all her coffee, and emptied the scraps from her plate into her handkerchief. Then she approached the counter where the young woman stood.

"Thank you kindly, ma'am. I've made a good meal."

Then she went outdoors into the crisp morning air. The snow-storm was over, and the day was delightful — blue above, white below. It was like a fairy world. She walked to the end of the platform, unrolled her shawl, and, freeing her mummy-like dog, set his breakfast before him. He ate with

avidity, then, showing a disinclination to return to his bandages, hopped on his three legs along the platform beside her, his crooked tail meanwhile describing successive circles in the air. Some of the loiterers about the station gathered around him, and seeing that his bodily infirmities were a subject of mirth rather than of compassion, 'Tilda Jane, in spite of warm protests on his part, once more swathed him in his shawl, and carried him with dignity into the waiting-room. There she sat until the agreeable young man ran in and said her train was coming.

Something warned her that she ought to implore him to tell some one to have a care of her — to see that she did not again get carried beyond her destination, but a kind of paralysis seized upon her tongue, and she could only open her mouth and gape stupidly at him.

"You'll be all right now," he said, with a nod. "Jump when you hear Ciscasset."

"Ciscasset, Ciscasset!" she repeated the name in a kind of desperation, then, as the train started with a jerk and she tumbled into a seat, she said

aloud, and without addressing any one in particular, "I wish to jump off at Ciscasset."

"Bless the child!" ejaculated an old lady in the seat before her, "I guess this is her first journey," and turning around, she stared mildly.

"Oh, ma'am," said 'Tilda Jane, "can't you help me get off at Ciscasset? The train goes so fast, an' I'm so little."

"Bless the child!" said the old lady again, "of course I will. Conductor, this little girl wishes to get off at Ciscasset."

"All right," said that official, hurrying by.

"This little girl wishes to get off at Ciscasset," exclaimed the old lady once more, this time to a brakeman.

He nodded and passed on, and presently the conductor returned and said, smartly, "Tickets!"

"I ain't got any," replied 'Tilda Jane.

"Then you must buy one," said the old lady; "have you got any money, my dear?"

'Tilda Jane never thought of asking the conductor if he had not been informed of her mishap. She never dreamed that the pleasant-faced young man

had forgotten to ask that she be carried back to the station for which she had bought her ticket. Therefore she drew her handkerchief from her pocket, untied a knot in its corner, and slowly produced fifty cents.

"Is that all the money you've got?" asked the conductor, briskly.

"Yes, sir."

"Where do you come from?"

'Tilda Jane preserved a discreet silence.

"Put it up," he said, waving his hand toward the handkerchief and immediately going away.

"Oh, what a nice kind man!" said the old lady. "He's going to let you ride free."

'Tilda Jane breathed more freely, and returned her handkerchief to its place.

The conductor, meanwhile, had gone to a Pullman car in the rear, where a man in plain clothes was lying back on a seat, apparently engaged in an aimless, leisurely scrutiny of the occupants of the car.

"Jack," said the conductor, "there's a slip of a girl in the day car — poor clothes, shawl bundle, no money, won't tell where she comes from, making a

great fuss about going to Ciscasset, looks like an emigrant."

"All right," said Jack, laconically, then he gave an imperceptible nod toward a trio of well-dressed young men engaged in card playing. "Want to see me nab that New York jeweller's clerk?"

"Yep," said the conductor.

"Got any telegrams in your pocket?"

"Two."

"Lend me one, and sit down here a minute."

Jack got up, the conductor took the vacated seat, and waited one, two, three minutes, and then Jack reappeared from between the curtains of the drawing-room at the rear of the car.

"A telegram for H. J. Bolingbroke," he called, in a loud voice; "any passenger of that name in this car?"

The youngest of the three men playing cards involuntarily raised his head, started from his seat, half extended his hand, then drew back.

Jack tossed the telegram to the conductor, and nodded to the young man. "Thought you were travelling under an assumed name. H. J. Boling-

broke *alias* Blixton. Have you got those diamonds in your pocket?"

The young man flushed painfully, while his fellow players threw down their cards and surveyed him curiously.

"Trouble you to follow me to another car," said Jack, and he led the way for the detected smuggler.

'Tilda Jane saw the two men pass, and innocently stared at them, little dreaming that her turn was to come next.

After awhile Jack reappeared and sat down in a seat behind 'Tilda Jane. After noticing the ineffectual attempts made by the old lady to draw the little girl into conversation, he leaned over and poured some candy into her lap from a bag he held in his hand.

"Have some, sissy?"

She gratefully flashed him a glance over her shoulder. "Thank you, sir."

"Going far?" he asked, agreeably.

"To Ciscasset," she said, feverishly. "Will you tell me when we come to it?"

"Certainly. Going to visit friends?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, going home?"

"No, sir."

"Your home isn't quite so near as Ciscasset?"

"No, sir."

"Did you bring that small dog across the ocean with you?" he asked, his keen eye noting a stirring inside the bundle.

"No, sir."

"Where did you pick him up?"

"Some boys were goin' to drown him."

"So you're a kind little girl."

"I ain't as good as I ought to be," she said, warmly; "but I'm goin' to try to be better. Oh, sir, are we at Ciscasset yet?"

"No, this is Vanceboro, the border station between Canada and the States. I guess you'd better come this way for Ciscasset, little girl."

"Why, this train goes direct to Ciscasset," interposed the old lady.

"Yes, ma'am, but this little girl is a stop-over. She'll probably go on the next train."

The old lady grew suspicious. "You let that

child alone, sir. Where's the conductor? Conductor, I say, come here. Can't some one get the conductor? Don't go with him one step, little girl."

'Tilda Jane, grown very pale, gazed apprehensively at the man, and did not offer to leave her seat.

He threw back his coat and displayed a badge. "Madam, I'm a government inspector."

"A government inspector! What's that?" the old lady spluttered, eyeing him over her glasses.

"Well, madam, there ain't much time for explanation, but I can tell you this much, namely, that we have to detain and examine all persons without means of livelihood who attempt to enter the United States from foreign countries."

She still gazed at him suspiciously. "I never heard of such a thing. I guess this is a free country."

"Yes, ma'am, and the government wants to keep it free. If you get a lot of pauper foreigners here, it'll not be free long."

"This little girl is American, ain't you, sissy?"

"I'm an orphan," said 'Tilda Jane, guardedly.

Whatever happened, she was determined not to admit too much.

At this moment the conductor appeared, and the old lady hailed him indignantly. "What does this mean, sir? This little girl offered to pay her passage. I saw her with my own eyes. Now you're going to put her off the train."

"It's all right, ma'am," he said, soothingly, "she'll likely be allowed to go on to-morrow."

"And you'll keep that innocent child here all day, and she too frightened to breathe?" cried the old lady. "I never heard of such doings. I'll write the President! I'll show you up in the papers!"

"She'll be well taken care of, madam," said the conductor. "There's a good hotel here. All detained are lodged and fed at government expense. She'll be put in charge of a chambermaid."

"You're a set of villains!" said the old lady, wrathfully.

"Oh, law!" groaned the conductor, "I'm sick of these fusses. Pick up her traps, Jack."

"Come, little girl," said Jack, kindly, and 'Tilda Jane, seeing that the inevitable had once more over-

taken her, rose resignedly, but the too kind and officious old lady clung to her so wildly that the two men were forced to draw her away from her.

'Tilda Jane, in a state of complete bewilderment totally unmixed with terror, for she had taken a liking to the kind face of her guide, trotted meekly after him into the shadow of a long V-shaped building. The platform was crowded with people. Two trains were standing at the station, and in a large dining-room on her right she saw thronged tables and hurrying waitresses.

She was ushered into a room where there was a handsomely dressed woman with a flushed face and tearful eyes, a dejected looking boy and girl sitting very close to each other, a diminutive and poorly dressed German Jew, and a composed looking man sitting behind a small table.

"I'll have to leave you now," said her guide. "Don't be scared, but speak up," and with a reassuring smile he disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

DEAF AND DUMB.

'TILDA JANE sat down on a bench in the corner and took the dog on her lap.

The fashionably dressed woman was speaking and gesticulating earnestly in front of the man whose face was only a trifle less calm and stony than that of Ruth Ann.

"I never heard of such a thing in my life — to take my sealskin coat from me in the dead of winter. Now if it was summer, it wouldn't be so bad. My nice coat that cost me four hundred and seventy-five dollars."

The man listened stolidly.

"And you tell me your government orders you to take ladies' jackets from them. It seems incredible!"

'Tilda Jane curiously scanned the garment under discussion. It certainly was very handsome.

"It is incredible, madam. The government does not wish to deprive ladies of their sealskin coats. It merely requires its custom officials, of whom I am one, to enforce the law which has been made to prevent the importation of sealskin coats free of duty."

"And have you taken many jackets?" sneered the woman.

The official gazed at her in frigid silence.

"I'll go right back to Toronto, where I live," she said, indignantly. "I was going to buy my daughter's trousseau in New York, but I'll spend every cent at home. That's the way we will make New York suffer on account of your government being so hateful!" and she flounced from the room. The man behind the table cast a leisurely glance over the remaining occupants of the room. Then he addressed the dejected boy and girl.

"Hello, you! — what's your name?"

"Thaddeus and Mary Lee," said the boy, mournfully.

"Brother and sister?"

"Man and wife," responded the boy, lugubriously.

The assistant inspector elevated his eyebrows.

"What ages?"

"Nineteen and seventeen," sighed the lad.

"Where are you going?"

"To Boston."

"What for?"

"To look for work."

"Got any money?"

"Two dollars and seventy cents."

"That all?"

"Yes, sir."

"What place do you come from?"

"Chickaminga, Quebec."

"You'll take the 8.15 A. M. train back to-morrow," said the man, briefly. "Now, Deutscher," and he nodded to the German Jew.

The boy and girl left the room, hand in hand, with melancholy clothing them like a garment, and 'Tilda Jane gazed after them with wide-open eyes. Her attention, however, was soon distracted, for the little Jew, the instant he was indicated, sprang from his seat, extended both hands, and nimbly skipping over the floor between his numerous bundles, overwhelmed the inspector with a flood of German.

The inspector leaned back in his chair and at last put up a hand with a commanding, "Halt!"

The old man paused open-mouthed, and the inspector went on in German: "You left your home, you crossed the sea, you wish to go to Portland to relatives — so far, so good, but where are your papers?"

The old man broke into a second burst of eloquence.

"Your certificate," reiterated the inspector, "your writing from the captain of the ship."

The old man shook his head sadly. He had no papers.

'Tilda Jane did not understand a word of what he was saying, but his gestures were expressive, and she anxiously watched his interlocutor.

"Where did you land?" asked the inspector.

"In Halifax, Nova Scotia."

"From what ship?"

"*Das Veilchen.*"

"Captain's name?"

"Strassburger."

"Your name?"

"Franz Veier."

"I'll telegraph him. That's all."

"And can I not go to my friends now — at once? They are waiting, they are expecting. We have so much to say."

"No," said the inspector, and as the German burst out into groans and lamentations, he waved him from the room.

When the door closed, and 'Tilda Jane felt that the cold and scrutinising eyes of the inspector were fixed on her, she was stricken with sudden dumbness. How these people had talked! She could not in a month utter as much as they had said in a few minutes. The result of their loquacity had been a seeming paralysis of her organs of speech.

"What's your name, little girl?" said the official, with slight geniality.

Her lips parted, but no sound came from them.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" he asked, agreeably.

She shook her head, not from any knowledge of his meaning, but to signify her disinclination for speech.

"*Parlez-vous français?*" he went on, patiently.

Her head again negatived this question, and he inquired in Spanish if she knew that tongue.

The shaking of the head became mechanical, and as the inspector knew seventeen languages, he addressed her successively in each one of them.

After she had shaken her head at them all, he surveyed her a few seconds in meditative silence. Then he began to talk on his fingers. She was probably deaf and dumb.

'Tilda Jane joyfully uncurled her hands from the bundle on her lap. This was a safe medium of conversation, for talking on the fingers had been a favourite amusement of the orphans during silence hours; and she would not be tempted to say too much, and betray the fact that she was a runaway. Accordingly, she spelled out the information, "I am an orphan."

"Where do you come from?" he asked her.

"A long ways off," her finger tips informed him.

"Name of place?"

"I can't tell you," she responded.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"To —" she hesitated about the spelling of Cis-

casset, but got something near enough to it for him to understand.

"Any relatives there?" he spelled on his fingers.

"No."

"Going to visit?'

"No."

"Have you any money?" he next asked her, and she politely and speedily informed him that she had fifty cents.

"You must tell me where you come from," came next from him in peremptory finger taps.

"No, sir," she replied, with spirited movements.

"Then you'll stay here till you do," he responded, and with a yawn he rose, turned his back to her, and looked out of the window.

'Tilda Jane took up her dog, and slipped out of the room. She was not frightened or sorry for the deception she had just practised. It did not seem to her that it was deception. For the time being she was deaf and dumb, and, far from being alarmed by her helpless condition, she possessed the strong conviction that she would be well taken care of. She had also ceased to worry about the board of lady

managers, and in her present comfortable, callous state of mind she reflected that she might stay here a year, and they would never think of looking for her in a railway station. She was lost to them, and she gaily hummed a tune as she strolled to and fro on the big wooden platform, watching the shunting engines, the busy custom-house officers, and the station yard employees, who were cleaning, rubbing, scouring, and preparing cars for further journeys.

At twelve o'clock, just as she was beginning to stifle yawns, and gaze wistfully at the windows of the dining-room, a young girl in a white apron came and stood in the doorway, and, shading her eyes from the sun shining in such dazzling brightness on the snow, beckoned vigorously to 'Tilda Jane.

The little girl needed no second invitation, and, with her dog limping behind her, trotted nimbly toward her new friend.

"Poor little soul — she's deef and dumb," said the dining-room girl, compassionately, as she passed a group of men in the hall. "Ain't it a pity?"

'Tilda Jane did not speak or smile, nor did her

conscience, often so troublesomely sensitive, now give one reproving twinge. Since talking to the inspector she felt as if deaf and dumb. She had been officially proclaimed so, and in meek patience she seated herself at the table, calmly pointed to what she wished, and, being most tenderly and assiduously waited upon by the pitying girl, ate a large and excellent dinner.

At the orphan asylum there had never been fare such as this, and, after she had finished her chocolate pudding, and put in her pocket a juicy orange that she could not possibly eat, she bowed her head, and internally and thankfully repeated the orphanage grace after meat.

"Just look at her!" exclaimed the admiring girl. "Ain't she cute? What kind of folks must she have to let such a poor little innocent travel alone? I don't believe she's obstinate. That assistant inspector is as hateful as he can be. Come, sissy, and I'll show you to your room," and she approached 'Tilda Jane, and took her by the hand.

The latter pointed to her dog, and not until she had seen him satisfy the demands of his appetite.

would she consent to follow her guide to a neat little apartment in the top of the wooden hotel.

Upon arriving there, she thanked the girl by a smile, closed the door, and, throwing herself on her bed, was soon buried in sweet and wholesome slumber.

CHAPTER VII.

CLEARING UP A MISTAKE.

THAT evening, when some of the custom-house officials and some of the guests of the hotel were sitting tipped back in chairs in the smoking-room, the assistant inspector said to the inspector, who had just come in, "I couldn't make anything of your deaf and dumb kid, Jack."

"What deaf and dumb kid?" asked Jack, seating himself, and drawing out his cigar case.

"That young one with the bundle."

"She ain't deaf and dumb. Her tongue's hung as limber as yours."

"Well, I swan!" said the assistant inspector, blankly, and, as he spoke, he brought his chair down on its four legs, and gazed about the room with an expression of such utter helplessness that the other men broke into a roar of laughter.

"Don't cry, Blakeman," said Jack, soothingly. "It's only once in a coon's age you're fooled."

"Do you suppose the slyboots has gone to bed?" asked Blakeman, again tipping back his chair, and returning to his professional manner. "Uncle Sam hasn't got any spare cash to waste on such like. Just open the door, Rufus, and see if you see any of the girls about."

A dining-room girl good-naturedly consented to go in search of 'Tilda Jane, and upon entering the room found her on her knees thoughtfully looking down at the railway tracks running close to the hotel.

Stepping forward and gently touching her shoulder, the girl pointed down-stairs.

'Tilda Jane nodded, smiled, and, taking her hand, went out into the hall and down the staircases with her. 'Tilda Jane stared at the ring of men sitting in the smoking-room. When she caught sight of her friend of the morning, she smiled and bobbed her head at him, then, letting her dog slip from her arm to the floor, she stood in silence, waiting to be questioned.

She had no doubt that this was some special tribunal called together to deliberate upon her case. She was not afraid of these men, they had kindly faces.

"What made you pretend you were deaf and dumb?" asked the inspector, at last.

She opened her mouth once or twice, tried to speak, failed, and at last articulated with difficulty, and with an air of genuine surprise, "Why — ain't I deef an' dumb? I ain't spoke ever since he made me think so till now," and she nodded toward the assistant inspector.

"I made you think so!" ejaculated Blakeman, irritably.

"Yes, sir," she said, dreamily, and lingering over her syllables as if she found a new pleasure in the exercise of speech. "You had so much to say, an' the other people had so much to say, that the room seemed chock full o' words. They was flyin' round ever so thick, but I couldn't ketch one o' them."

"Well, now, you've got to quit lying and tell us where you come from," said the assistant inspector, roughly. "You've got to be sent home to-morrow."

"Sent home?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Yes — to Canada. Now tell us the name of the place you belong to, or we'll ship you to some poorhouse."

"Do I come from Canada?" she asked, with a mystified air.

Jack jogged his assistant's elbow. "Seemed to me there was the smell of a ship about her."

"Not so," responded Blakeman who prided himself on distinguishing nationalities. "She hasn't any European accent. She's from right over the border here somewhere."

"Do you know my mother?" 'Tilda Jane was eagerly asking the assistant inspector.

"Yes — know her well. If you don't speak up I'll telegraph her."

"Oh, I'll never speak then," said 'Tilda Jane, taking a step forward and clasping her hands painfully. "Oh, sir, do telegraph to my mother. I've cried an' cried at nights 'bout her. Other girls has mothers that loves 'em an' strokes their hair, an' nobody ever done that to me. They just thinks I'm ugly. Oh, sir, oh, sir, won't you telegraph my mother?"

Blakeman had gone too far. The sentiment of the meeting was against him, and a low murmur warned him to retract what he had said.

"I don't mean your mother," he said, sulkily. "I mean your guardians."

"The lady-boards?" asked 'Tilda Jane, eagerly.

He did not know what "lady-boards" meant, but his silence seemed to give assent to her question, and losing the bright flush that had come to her face, she relapsed into painful and profound silence.

He would never know how he had hurt her. Oh! what hopes he had raised, and in an instant dashed to the ground, and checking the convulsion in her throat, she stealthily wiped away the two tears of distress coursing down her thin cheeks.

"Don't cry," said Jack, kindly. "I expect you're tired from your trip in the train yesterday. You had a pretty long one, hadn't you?"

"Yes, Mr. Jack," she said, humbly. "It seemed kind o' long, but I'm not used to bein' drug along so mighty quick."

"I didn't notice her till we passed McAdam Junction," whispered Jack to his assistant. "She's

come down from some place in New Brunswick. Telegraph McAdam."

"They'll not know," growled Blakeman. "Robinson on yesterday's Montreal express is the man. He'll be back to-night. He'll know where she got on. If he'd reported, 'twould have saved this."

"I guess he didn't think we'd struck such an obstacle," remarked Jack, with a chuckle. Then he said aloud, "Don't you suppose they'll be worrying about you, sissy?"

"No, sir," she said, meekly, "they'll be more mad than worried."

"You haven't lost that paper with the address, have you?" said Jack, cunningly.

"No, sir," and she put her hand to her breast.

He got up and walked toward her. "Let me see if I can read it."

"There's no 'casion for that," she said, with dignity.

"You'll have to let me see it," he said, firmly, so firmly that it being no part of her plan to "dare the undarable," she quietly handed Hank's card to him.

"Hobart Dillson, Ciscasset, Maine," he read, then

he gave it back to her. "Thank you, sissy. I guess you can go to bed now."

"In a minute," said 'Tilda Jane, submissively, while she made a queer bob of a curtsey to all present. "Gen'l'men all — before I go I must say somethin'. Up-stairs jus' now I was ponderin' on my wickedness. I guess you think I don't know that all liars has their portion in the lake o' fire an' brimstone. I knows it an' feels it, but gen'l'men I ain't told no more lies nor I could help. That 'bout bein' deef an' dumb I can't call a lie, 'cause I felt it, an' I'm s'prised now to hear myself talk. But I have told lies, an' I know it. To-day I had a boss dinner. I went to sleep an' on my bed I dreamed. Somethin' roared an' shook the house an' I woke in a sweat. Did I think the devil had come after me? Yes, sirs — gen'l'men, I've been awful bad, I don't s'pose any of you knows what such badness is. I'm afeared I've got to go on lyin' till I like lies better'n truth. That's what the — what ladies I has known said would happen to little girls as stepped aside from the paths of righteousness."

The men were all staring at her, the assistant

inspector most intently, for this flow of language from the supposedly deaf and dumb child surprised even him — a man used to surprises.

"I'm goin' to repent some day," continued 'Tilda Jane, sadly, "just as soon as I get out o' this, an' enjoyin' fam'ly life. I'm goin' to repent of all 'cept one thing, an' I can't repent 'bout that 'cause I dunno if it's wrong. Do you like dogs?" and she abruptly addressed the assistant inspector.

"No," he said, brusquely.

"What do you like?" she went on, wistfully, "cats, birds, children — do you like girls, sir, nice little girls with blue eyes an' curly hair?"

The assistant inspector was a remarkably fine blond specimen of a man, and, as he was popular among the young women of the neighbourhood, 'Tilda Jane's artless question produced a burst of laughter from his companions, and a furious flaming of colour in his own face.

Her question had gone home, and she proceeded. "Suppose you had a nice little girl an' some one wanted to take her away, an' frighten her, an' tie jinglin' things to her an' make her run, an' you'd ketch her up an'

"'I'M GOIN' TO REPENT SOME DAY.'"

run off to the woods, would that be awful wicked, do you s'pose, an' would you have to repent?"

The assistant inspector preserved a discreet and resentful silence, but two or three of his companions murmured between their pipe-stems and their lips, "Not much he wouldn't."

"Now that's what troubles me," 'Tilda Jane continued. "The rest is bad, but is that bad? I guess I'll have to ask some minister, an', gen'l'men all, I guess you'd better let me go on to Ciscasset. You've got a nice place here, an' plenty o' things to eat, an' I think you're very fair, but I feel like movin' on," and pausing, she anxiously scanned the row of faces about her.

"Run away to bed now," said Jack. "We'll tell you to-morrow what you're to do," and as 'Tilda Jane picked up her pet and disappeared, he sauntered across the room, took up a telegraph form, and addressed a message to the creamery shark's father.

"Hobart Dillson, Ciscasset. Girl, age about twelve. Dark hair, eyes — run away from place unknown. Going to your address. Held as immigrant without means. Refuses to give name. Can you supply any information? Answer paid for."

CHAPTER VIII.

A THIRD RUNNING AWAY.

"Look here, little girl," said Jack, stopping 'Tilda Jane as she was coming out of the dining-room the next morning, "I've had a telegram from your friend in Ciscasset."

"An' what does he say?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I'll read it," and he drew a paper from his pocket. "Never heard of girl. Don't want her. Hobart Dillson."

'Tilda Jane looked crestfallen, but did not flinch in face of the new difficulty. "He's a cranky ole man. He'll be all right when I talk to him."

"Well, you're a queer fish," muttered her friend, as by way of hiding her chagrin she went quickly up-stairs. "We can't do anything with you till Robinson gets back, and tells us where he picked you up."

The assistant inspector met her in the hall above

"Have you made up your mind to talk yet?" he asked, austerely.

'Tilda Jane shook her head.

"I've been amusing myself by telegraphing along the line," he said, in the same tone of voice. "None of the stations know anything about you, and the agent at McAdam has started off in the woods for his holidays. The conductor that brought you is laid up from an accident to his train, so you've got to speak for yourself; and do you know what I've made up my mind to do?"

"No, sir," she said, steadily.

"By to-night if you won't tell me where you come from, I'm going to take that dog away from you."

Her face turned a sickly yellow, but she did not quail. "You wouldn't shoot him, would you?"

"No, I won't shoot him," he said, deliberately. "I guess I'd give him to some nice little girl who wouldn't tell lies."

'Tilda Jane's head sank on her breast. "Gimme till to-morrow morning, sir. I'd like to think it over."

"I'll see about it," he said, with a curious glance at her; then he went away.

'Tilda Jane knew that he would give her till the morning. She would not be troubled by him all day. She would have time to think. The worst difficulty in her experience confronted her. She would lose her dog in any case. To speak was to be sent back to the asylum, to remain silent was to let her Gippie become the cherished darling of some other girl, and in mute agony she caressed the smooth brown head, and put her hand before the almost sightless eyes as if she would hide from them even a suspicion of coming danger.

Mr. Jack had just stepped on one of the out-going trains. She could not appeal to him, and the table-girls, since they had found that she was a story-teller, slighted her in a most marked way.

She wandered down-stairs and out-of-doors. All day she loitered about the station platform watching the trains come in, — deliberate freight-trains, with their loads of merchandise, all to be examined by the busy customs officials, and rushing express trains, with their hundreds of hungry passengers

who swept in crowds into the spacious dining-room.

She saw her companions in captivity borne away. The fashionable lady got on a train that was entering Canada, and the dismal boy and girl followed her. The little German Jew, who had been roaming about the hotel like a restless ghost, always with his hat on and a bundle in his hand as if he wished to impress all beholders with the fact that he was only tarrying for a short time, had, on the receipt of a telegram informing the inspectors that he had merely forgotten his papers, become a happy maniac. He ran to and fro, he collected his bundles, dropped them, to kiss the hand of a table-girl who gave him some cakes for his lunch, and had to be restrained by main force from boarding every train that pulled up at the station.

Fortunate travellers and unfortunate orphan! She could not get on one of the trains and be borne away. She was watched; she felt it, for she had now a perfect comprehension of the system of espionage established over unsuspecting travellers. The rich and well-dressed ones were passed by

unless they were wearing sealskin wraps, the poor and penniless must give an account of themselves. So there was no escape for her by train. She must take to the road.

She had better go lie down and try to sleep, she reflected with a shudder, as she had now before her the prospect of another night in the woods. As soon as it got dark, she must try to slip away from the hotel.

At six o'clock she had had her nap and was in her favourite spot on her knees by her open window. Night was approaching, and she felt neither sorry, nor frightened, nor apprehensive. The sun was going down, and she was so completely wrapped in deep and silent content that she could neither speak nor think. She did not know that she was an ardent lover of nature — that her whole soul was at the present moment so filled with the glory of the winter evening that she had no room for her own troubles.

The clanging supper-bell disturbed her, and, with a sigh and a look of longing farewell at the sky, she closed the window and made her way to the dining-room.

After supper she returned to her post, and, as she could not now see the glorious sky and the snowy fields, she let her attention fall upon the trains below that had begun to have a strange fascination for her. She had lost all fear of them by this time, and had even begun to notice that there were differences in them just as there were differences in people. Some were big and bulky, others were quick and dashing. Some had hoarse voices, some clear ones. The Canadian engines coming in shrieked in one tone, the American ones, passing them from the other direction, replied in another.

Hour after hour went by, and with the time her sense of dreamy contentment faded away. It gave her but little dismay to look out into the starlit night and fancy herself alone in snowy solitudes, but it gave her considerable dismay to look down below, and find that the hotel was neither getting dark nor perfectly quiet, as she fancied all well-regulated houses did at night. She had forgotten that they could not sleep here, at least everybody could not. Trains were coming and going all the

time, and with this constant supervision below, how could she evade detection?

"Number seventeen is an hour late and getting later every minute," she heard some one call after a time; "bad snow-drifts up north."

"Guess I'll take a wink of sleep," a tired voice responded, "there'll be nothing but freights for a spell," and then followed comparative silence.

Footsteps were only occasionally heard, fewer lights flashed in the distance, and it was only at much longer intervals that passing trains shook the house. There was a lull in the constant noises, and now was the time for action. She rose stealthily, and took her dog in her arms — a pathetic child figure no longer, but a wary, stealthy little elf endeavouring to escape from danger threatened by these larger and more powerful human beings.

Her sleeping-room was a tiny chamber opening out of one occupied by two of the dining-room girls. She was not afraid of their waking. She had heard them say as they undressed that they had to get up at half-past four to iron table-cloths and

napkins, and there was not an instant's interruption of their heavy, dreamless slumber as she stole noiselessly by them.

Now for the staircase. She paused anxiously at the top, and looked down. There was no one in sight, and holding her breath, and tiptoeing cautiously, she stole down step by step.

At last she was at the bottom of both flights of stairs. So far so good, and she laid her hand on the knob of the front door that was never locked. But stop, let her pause — there were sounds outside.

Some one out there hesitated, halted, and remarked to some other person behind, "Will you come in and have a bite of something to eat?"

'Tilda Jane scarcely dared to breathe, and, gazing down the hall behind her, shook in her substantial shoes. She could see the office at the end of the hall, and the sleepy clerk napping at his desk. If she retreated toward him, he might wake up and discover her, and if the men entered she could not possibly avoid being caught by them.

In intense anxiety she awaited results. There were only a few seconds of uncertainty, then her

heart gave a bound of thankfulness. The footsteps had passed on, and only waiting till they died away, she opened the door and glided through.

Now she was on the brightly lighted platform at the mercy of any passer-by, or any wakeful person who might be at one of the hotel windows. She made one swift rush across it, one leap over the railway tracks, and with a stifled exclamation of thankfulness found herself on the village road.

Like a dark, diminutive ghost she sped up the hill past the silent houses. Now she was comparatively safe, yet which way should she go? She was completely puzzled, yet she had a vague idea that there were great forests surrounding Vanceboro, for she had heard the men at the hotel talk of fishing and shooting.

Trembling in every limb from excitement, and pressing her precious bundle closely to her, she took a road to the left. She must not go to the right, for across the river was Canada, and if she got into that foreign country again, she would have fresh difficulties in returning to her own native one. She would press on through the village, take to the

woods, and trust to luck to find some house where she could ask the way to Ciscasset.

There was a moon to-night, an old, pale moon, and it cast a tremulous light over the soft, white fields sloping down to the Sainte-Croix River, the sleeping village, and the brightly lighted station yard in the hollow. She turned around, took one farewell glance at the habitations of men, and plunged into the winding road leading into the heart of the forest.

Hour after hour she plodded on. This reminded her of her walk with Ruth Ann two evenings before, only here there was more light, the snow was deeper, and the trees were not as high as those on the way to the Moss Glen station. She hoped with a shiver that she should meet no wild beasts. Hark! What was that crashing through the alder bushes? She stopped short, clasped her dog to her breast, and looked about for some means of defence. Nothing offered but a dry tree branch, and she was just bending over to seize it when there rushed by her, so quickly that she had no time to be afraid, an object that caused a faint smile of pleasure to come to her pale lips.

This was a large deerhound running along with his nose to the snow, and he paid no more attention to her than if she had been one of the stumps by the side of the road.

"Here, doggie, doggie!" she called, wistfully, but he did not return, and, startled by the sound of her voice in the intense stillness, she hastily resumed her way.

How solemn the moon was, staring down at her with that section of a face on which she fancied she saw an ear, the corner of a mouth, and one terrible, glistening eye. "Little girl, where are you going? Are you doing right? Are you not a naughty little girl?"

"I can't think about it now," she said, desperately. "When I git settled down I'll square things up. Anyway, I'm not bad for the fun of it. Law me, ain't this road long! Here, Gippie, I guess you might walk a few steps. Keep in my tracks an' I'll not let anythin' hurt you. If a bear comes, he'll eat me first. It'll do you good to stretch your legs a mite."

Away back in the hotel Mr. Jack was just getting

home. "We can let our deaf and dumb kid go in the morning," he said to his assistant, who got on the train as he left it. "The waitress at McAdam was just inquiring about her — says she's U. S. all right. Came from Moss Glen station, didn't know Ciscasset when she got to it, and was carried on. Agent forgot to speak to Robinson about her, and the waitress wanted to know if she got through all right."

"U. S.," grumbled the assistant inspector, pausing with his foot on the steps of the baggage-car, "why didn't she say so?"

"Was frightened — I guess she'd run away — a case of innocence abroad."

"Well, we can't hold her if she isn't an immigrant," said Blakeman, with relief. "Let her go. They've got a poorhouse in Ciscasset, I suppose."

"She'll go in no poorhouse," said Mr. Jack, with a chuckle. "She's too smart."

If he could have seen at that moment the weary little figure toiling along the forest road, he would have uttered the appreciative adjective with even more energy. Tired, hungry, occasionally stooping

to lift a handful of snow to her lips, 'Tilda Jane plodded on. Her thin figure was bent from fatigue. She had again picked up the wailing dog, and had slung him on her back in the shawl, yet there was not the slightest indication of faltering in her aspect. There were no clearings in the woods, no promise of settlement, yet her face was ever toward the promised land of Ciscasset, and her back to the place of captivity in Vanceboro.

CHAPTER IX.

LOST IN THE WOODS.

NOTHING could be more exquisitely beautiful than that winter morning in the Maine woods. The white glory of the snow, the stealing pink and gold glances of the sun, the bravery of the trees proudly rearing their heads aloft and stretching out their heavily laden arms, — all made a picture that filled with awe even the heart of rough Bob Lucas, unregistered guide and nominal lumberman, noted for his skill as hunter and poacher and his queer mingling of honesty, law-breaking, piety, and profanity.

No, it was not a picture, it was reality, and he was a part of it. He was in it, he belonged to this glorious morning, the morning belonged to him, and he put up his hand and pulled off his cap.

"Branching candlesticks on the altar of the Lord," he muttered as he surveyed the trees. "I

feel like a vessel o' grace, more's the pity I can't take on the actions o' one."

He stood lounging in the cabin door — red-haired, long-nosed, unkempt, and stalwart. Inside were his two sons getting the breakfast, and the appetising odour of frying bacon floated out on the fresh air.

"Hi, Poacher — whot's up with you?" he suddenly exclaimed, and his gaze went to a deerhound of unusually sturdy build, who was ploughing through the snow toward the cabin.

The dog wagged his tail, advanced, and, lifting toward him a countenance so bright with intelligence that it might almost be called human, opened his mouth, and dropped something at his master's feet.

"Hello, boys!" said the man, stepping inside the cabin; "what in the name o' creation's this? I call it a morsel of woman's togs. Don't your mother wear aprons like it, or somethin'?"

The two strapping lads in high boots and woollen shirts turned their red faces from the fireplace.

"Yes, siree," said the taller of them, fingering

the scrap of cotton; "they call it something like jingo."

"Gingham, you gull," interposed his brother, with a guffaw of laughter. "I've seen it in the stores. Where'd you get it, pop?"

"Poacher fetched it. When I got out o' my bunk this mornin' an' opened the door, he put up that ole muzzle of his an' give a sniff. Then off he sot. I knew he'd got somethin' on his mind. He's been runnin' deer, an' he found this on his way back."

"He's a beaut," said the other lad, eyeing him admiringly. "He's nosed out something. What'll you do, pop?"

"Swaller some breakfast an' make tracks for Morse's camp."

"S'pose it was some person," said the younger of the boys, uneasily.

"By gum!" and the man suddenly smote his thigh, "s'pose the ole woman had run after us with somethin'. Hustle on your coats, boys. Mebbe it's your ma."

The faces of both boys had turned white, and

their hands were shaking. Seizing their coats, they rushed out of the cabin.

"Pop, it wasn't bitter last night," said the younger, in a hushed voice.

"Shut up!" said his father, irritably, and in profound silence the three proceeded through the wood in single file, following the dog who, without excitement, but with his dark face beaming with pleasure at being understood, rapidly led them over his own tracks of a few minutes previous.

Mile after mile they went in silence, until at last the father, who was leading, made a leap forward.

There was a dark mound on the snow against a tree trunk, and dropping beside it he turned it over.

"Thank the Lord!" he ejaculated, while scratching and beating the snow away from it, "it ain't what I feared."

"Why, it's only a gal," said one of the boys. "Is she gone, pop?"

"Here — shake her up," he replied. "What's this she's curled round? A dog, sure as thunder, an' alive an' warm. Merciful grindstones, look at him!"

Irritably stepping out of wrappings, consisting of a small tippet and a shawl, was a little old dog, the most utter contrast to the handsome deerhound that could have been imagined.

The hound stared inquiringly and politely at Gippie, and, being a denizen of the woods, made the first overtures to friendship by politely touching him with the end of his muzzle.

The smaller dog snapped at him, whereupon the hound withdrew in dignified silence, and watched his owners, who were making vigorous efforts to restore the benumbed girl.

"Her heart's beatin'," said Lucas, putting his hand on it. "The dog lay there, an' kep' it warm."

"Rub her feet — rub harder," he said to his sons, while he himself began chafing 'Tilda Jane's wrists. "She's jist the age o' your sister Min. S'pose she was here, stone cold an' half dead!"

The boys redoubled their efforts at resuscitation, and presently a faint colour appeared in the little girl's marble cheeks, and the cold lips slightly moved.

Lucas put his head down. "What you sayin'? Dog, is it? He's all right. If you'd wrapped your-

self more, an' him less, it might 'a' bin better. Yet, I guess not. If it hadn't 'a' bin for the dog, you'd 'a' bin dead. Put on her shoes, boys. We'll carry her to that heap o' logs of ours."

"Pop, will one of us have to show her out?" said Joe, anxiously pressing beside him.

"Yep," said his father. "Here, strip off your coat an' put it round her."

"An' I s'pose I'll hev to go 'cause I'm the youngest," said the boy, bitterly.

"No, sir — you're always doin' dirty work. This time it'll be Zebedee."

Zebedee frowned, and muttered that he wished girls would stay out o' the woods; then he tramped on beside his brother.

"Here, gimme my gun," said Lucas, presently. "You-uns is younger. You kin carry the gal."

He had been carrying 'Tilda Jane over his shoulder, and now the little procession started again, this time with the boys bearing the semi-unconscious burden.

Gippie, squealing and complaining, followed behind as well as he was able, but finally, becoming

stuck in a drift, gave a despairing yell and disappeared.

Lucas turned around, went in the direction of the crooked tail sticking up from the snow, and pulling him out, contemptuously took him under his arm.

"If you was my dog, you'd get a bullet to eat. Howsomever, you ain't, an' I guess we'll hev to keep you for the leetle gal. Git on thar, sons."

Two hours later, 'Tilda Jane opened her eyes on a new world. Where had her adventures brought her this time? Had she died and gone to heaven? No, this must be earth, for she had just heard a string of very bad words uttered by some one near her. But she could not think about anything. A feeling of delicious languor overpowered her, and slowly opening and shutting her eyes, she little by little allowed her surroundings to impress themselves upon her.

She was very warm and comfortable; she was sitting on the floor, propped against the wall by means of an overturned chair and blankets; a fire in an open fireplace blazed beside her; Gippie was

making his toilet before this fire, and she was very happy.

"Here, sup this," some one said, and languidly lifting her eyelids, she saw a big red-haired man bending over her.

He was holding a cup to her lips — coffee sweetened with molasses. Just what they used to have at the asylum, and with a faint smile, and a feeble "Thank you, sir," she slowly swallowed it.

"I was scared to give you any before," he said, gruffly; "thought you might choke. Here, gimme some grub, sons."

'Tilda Jane felt a morsel of something put in her mouth. It was followed by another morsel of something hot and savoury, and speedily she felt new life in her veins. She could sit up now, and look about her.

"Guess you can feed yourself," said the man, going back to the table. "Fall to now — you most got to the end of your tether."

'Tilda Jane took the two-pronged fork he put in her hand, and began to eat with slow avidity, not disregarding the requests for titbits from her dog,

who occasionally paused for that purpose in his endeavours to lick himself dry.

At intervals she cast a glance at the centre of the cabin, where a man and two boys were seated at a rough table. These must be her rescuers. She had fallen down in the snow the night before. Not even her fear of death had been able to keep her on her feet.

She stopped eating. "Who be you?"

"We be lumbermen, when the fit takes us," said the man, shortly.

"Well," said 'Tilda Jane, "I guess —" then she stopped, overpowered by intense feeling.

"I guess," she went on, finally, "that there wouldn't 'a' bin much o' me this morning if it hadn't bin for you comin'."

"'Twasn't us," said the man, agreeably, "'twas Poacher there," and he indicated the dog under the table, who, at the mention of his name, rose and walked politely toward the little girl.

He looked at her and she looked at him, then he took a step nearer and laid his muzzle on her shoulder. With exquisite subtlety he comprehended

all that she wished to say in relation to himself, and all that she felt in relation to the dog race in general.

She laid her cheek against his velvet ear. Then her arm stole around his neck.

The dog stood in courteous silence, until, feeling embarrassed under her attention, he looked somewhat foolishly at his master, and appealingly licked 'Tilda Jane's cheek.

As quick to understand him as he was to understand her, she released him, whereupon he lay down beside her and put his handsome head on her lap.

Gippie extended his muzzle, sniffed suspiciously, then his short-sighted eyes discovering the presence of a rival, he advanced snapping.

The large dog generously averted his head, and Gippie, seeing that he was not to be dislodged, meanly curled himself up on Poacher's glossy back.

"Yes, that's a boss dog," the man went on. "Search the State from Fort Kent to Kittery Depot, and you'll not find a cuter. He's given me

"HE LAY DOWN BESIDE HER."

pointers many a time — where you hail from, leetle gal?"

"I'm going to Ciscasset," she said, dreamily. Her mind was running back to the night before, and, unaware that she was holding a piece of bacon poised on her fork in tempting proximity to Poacher's nose, she stared intently at the fire.

She had been near death. Had she been near the heaven that the matron and the "lady-boards" pictured, or would it have been the other place, on account of her disobedience?

"The soul that sinneth it shall die" — "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" — "Keep thyself pure" — "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie" — that meant without the city, the beautiful city of gold where her mother probably was, and many of her unknown relatives, and where all good matrons, orphans, and "lady-boards" went.

"I guess I'd bin without, with no comfort but the dogs," she thought bitterly, and pushing away

her plate, she said aloud, "I thank ye kindly, but I can't swaller another morsel."

A roar of laughter saluted her ears. Gippie's inquiring muzzle had scented out the bacon and had seized it, whereupon Poacher, knowing that it was not intended for him, had gently but firmly taken it from him, and was walking about the cabin, holding it aloft, while Gippie snarled at his heels.

'Tilda Jane paid no attention to them. The greater matter of her soul's destiny was under consideration. "Are you an extry good man?" she abruptly asked her host.

He stopped laughing, and a shadow came over his face. Then his glance went to his boys. "What you say, sons?"

The boys stared at each other, avoided his eye, and said, uneasily, "Course you be, pop — don't make game."

"Make game," repeated the man, strangely, "make game," then he laughed shortly, and made another onslaught on the bacon and bread.

"'Cause I'm lookin' for an extry good person,"

went on 'Tilda Jane, brusquely. "Some one that won't blab, an' that I kin tell a story to."

"Well, thar ain't no extry good persons in the woods," said her host, "we be only ordinary. You better wait till you git out. What was you doin' so far from houses last night, leetle gal, 'stead o' bein' tucked snug in bed?"

"I might as well tell the truth," she said, helplessly. "I'm tired o' lies. I was runnin' away from somethin', but whether my runnin' was good or bad is what I can't make out."

"While you're puzzlin' you eat some more breakfus'," said the man, getting up and putting another supply of bacon on her plate. "You've got to call up strength to git out. I s'pose you dunno you're some miles from sofas, an' pianos, an' easy chairs."

"I didn't know where I was goin'," she said, apologetically, "or what I was comin' to. I jus' travelled on an' on. Then I begun to get queery an' I left the road. Thinks I, there'll be kind animiles in the woods. Mebbe I'll meet a nice black bear, an' he'll say, 'Little girl, you're lost an' I'll lead you to my

den. We'll be happy to have you an' your little dog, an' I'll not let no one eat him, an' I'll give a big party an' invite all the foxes, an' deer, an' bears an' squirrels 'cause you're fond o' wild beasts, little girl.' An' it seemed I'd come to the bear's den, an' there was a soft bed, an' I just lay down, an' was goin' to sleep when I thought, 'Mebbe if I sleep, some little bird'll tell him I'm a baddie, an' he'll eat me up,' an' I felt just awful; then I forgot everythin' till I woke up here — I guess I'm obliged to you."

The lumberman was about to reply to her when one of the boys ejaculated, "Hist, pop, look at Poacher!"

CHAPTER X.

AMONG FRIENDS.

THE animal had gone to the door, and stood in a listening attitude.

"Some one's comin'," said the boy. "Is everythin' snug?"

The three cast hurried glances about the room, then shaking off a somewhat uneasy expression, the man stepped to the one and only window of the cabin.

"Game warden Perch," he said, dryly, "and registered guide Hersey. Comin' spyin' round — bad luck to 'em," and he sulkily went back to the table.

Presently there came a knocking at the door. "Come in," bawled Lucas, not inhospitably, and two men, much smarter, cleaner, and more dapper-looking than the red-haired man and his sons, entered the cabin.

"Howdye," they said simultaneously, as they stood their guns and snow-shoes against the wall, and took possession of the two boxes vacated by the boys at a sign from their father. Then, with an appearance of enjoyment, they dragged the boxes near the fire, and stretched out their hands to the blaze.

'Tilda Jane saw that they were staring in unmitigated astonishment at her, and with a feeling that she herself was out of the world and in a place where passers-by were few and infrequent, she examined them in equal interest.

"Where'd you come from?" asked the elder of them at last, fixing her with a pair of piercing eyes.

"She got keeled over on the old road last night," spoke up Lucas, much to her relief. "Lost her way. Dog here, found her," and he motioned toward Poacher, who was surveying the newcomers in cold curiosity.

Warden Perch's attention being drawn to the dog, he stared at him earnestly, then turned to his companion. "Ever see that animal before?"

"Not near at hand," said the other, with a slight

sneer. "Guess I've seen his hind legs and the tip of his tail once or twice."

"Hev some breakfus?" said Lucas, who was imperturbably going on with his own.

Warden Perch inspected the table. "Not on bacon — haven't you got something more uncommon?"

"We've got some beans in thar," said Lucas, with a backward nod of his head toward a bag on the floor, "coarse brown beans. They might be a treat for ye, seein' ye don't git 'em much in hotels."

Perch flushed angrily and opened his mouth as if to make a retort. Then he drew a blank book from his pocket, and to calm himself ran his eye over the report he was making for the game commissioner of the State.

"Left Nexter 10.55 A. M. March 1, for Bluefield. March 2 at Bearville 11.30 A. M. Jim Greene's camp Lake Clear at 4.35 P. M. March 3 left camp at 7 A. M. Bill Emerson's camp 9.47 A. M. Reached moose yard on back side Fern Brook Ridge 1.47 P. M. 3 moose in yard — Henry," he said, lifting his head and abruptly addressing his companion, "some of those poachers have mighty cute tricks."

Henry nodded assent.

"Those fellows at Hacmactac Station tried hard to fool us last week, — cut the legs off the deer, then got a couple of bears' feet and had the bone of the bear's leg slipped up under the skin on the leg of the deer. Then they put them up so sly in three layers of bagging with nothing but bears' feet sticking out, but I caught on to those bears' legs, and said the feet weren't big enough. So I had it opened and took the deer and the fellows to Mattawamkeag, and I guess they think forty dollars apiece was just about enough for a fine."

Lucas and his sons burst out laughing, and 'Tilda Jane shrewdly suspected by their amused faces and knowing glances that they had heard the story before. There was no love lost between these newcomers and her preservers, and Lucas and his sons would be glad when their callers left the cabin. But what was all this talk about deer? Surely they did not kill the pretty creatures whom without having seen she loved.

She cleared her throat and in a weak little voice addressed the game warden. "Sir, I've got pictures

in my joggafry of deer with branching horns. Does bad men kill them?"

Warden Perch gave her another alert glance. Here was no confederate of poachers. "Yes," he said, severely, "bad men do kill them, and dogs chase them, but mind this, young girl — poachers get nabbed in the long run. They slide for a time, but there's a trip-up at the end. And their dogs, too — I've shot three hounds this week for dogging deer."

"You have shot dogs!" repeated 'Tilda Jane, in a horrified tone, and pressing Gippie closer to her.

"If I didn't shoot them, they'd kill the deer," said the man, irritably.

"Oh!" murmured 'Tilda Jane. Here was one of the mysteries of nature that was quite beyond her comprehension. The dog hunted the deer, and the man hunted the dog. The deer apparently was the weaker one, and she must inquire into the matter.

"What does bad men kill deer for?" she asked, timidly.

"Haven't you ever eaten any deer meat?" asked the warden.

"I didn't know it was good to eat," she said, sadly.

"You haven't had any here in this cabin?"

"I guess not, unless I might 'a' eat it when I was fainty."

Lucas eyed her peculiarly, and the meaning of the warden's question and offensive manner burst upon her. "That's a good man," she said, indignantly, starting from her half-reclining position and pointing to Lucas. "I guess men that takes little girls out o' snow-banks don't kill deer."

Warden Perch laughed and rose from his seat. He had very little sentiment with regard to the animal creation. "I calculate we'd better be moving," he said, to the guide. "Don't suppose we'd see anything to keep us here, unless we'd hang on for the big snow-storm they say is coming, and that I expect you're waiting for," and he looked at Lucas.

"Me an' my sons," said the latter, coolly, "is on our way to David Morse's lumber camp. Two ot his hands had to come out 'count o' sickness. We lay out to git thar this evenin'. Was late in startin' last night, an' camped here. We'll hev to git this

leetle gal out, 'thout you might undertake it, seein' as you're makin' for outside, I s'pose."

"Get your own find out," said the warden, severely; "it will keep you out of mischief, and look here — if I find that dog of yours up to tricks, you know what I'll do."

"Shoot him on sight," said Lucas, stooping and patting the animal who was pressing close to him; "but you'll never ketch him, 'cause he ain't the sort o' dog to be ketched in any kind o' mischief; hey, Poacher?"

The guide went out, and the warden with a scowl followed, slamming the door after him.

Lucas and his sons crowded to the window to see their callers depart, and when they were fairly out of sight, they burst into relieved laughter, and noisily drew their boxes up to the fire.

"Say, pop, ain't he mad?" remarked Joe, excitedly. "Mad 'cause you're too cute for him. He'd give his teeth to fasten something on to you."

"Shut up," said his father, with a roll of his eye toward 'Tilda Jane.

The girl was puzzled. Lucas, who seemed a nice

man, was treated as if he were not a friend to the deer, while the departed ones, whom she did not like at all, seemed to be their protectors. "Who are those men?" she asked, curiously.

"Wal, I'll tell you," said Lucas, taking two moose ear skins from his pocket, and fitting them together to make a tobacco-pouch, "them two is fancy game men. The warden an' the guide likes to lounge in easy chairs round hotels an' tell of their doin's in the woods, how the poachers tremble an' run when they see 'em comin'. As a rule, they don't take to the woods till they're druv to it by some complaint. Then they're awful fierce, an' growl an' show their teeth, an' run home. Nobody don't care nothin' for 'em."

"Are there many men killing deer?" asked the little girl, falteringly.

"Many men!" groaned Lucas. "Law me, what a question! Las' year, leetle gal, thar was awful heavy snow, eight foot deep in Franklin County, seven foot in Somerset, Piscataquis, Penobscot, and Aroostook. What a year for big game! They couldn't git away. They was as helpless as sheep

Storm came on storm, till we was walkin' up among the tree branches and knockin' off the snow with a stick. Snow covered tracks, and poachers took possession o' the airth."

"They lived high in the lumber camps, pop, do you mind?" said Zebedee, smacking his lips. "When a fellow was starvin' the smell just come out to meet him."

"You bet, only you wasn't thar to smell it," said his father, sharply, "you mind that. You young ones takes to the woods too natural."

He surveyed them with mingled pride and dissatisfaction, then came back to his reminiscences. "I vum that was a winter, but the deer would 'a' starved if they hadn't been shot, for the snow was so deep that they couldn't get to their food. That there Perch made a great flurry about gettin' in an' drivin' six deer to a swamp where they could git green stuff, but I don't believe a word of it. I believe he shot and ate them."

"Do you mind the deer that was dogged into our yard, pop?" exclaimed Joe. "I saw 'em as they crossed the river — dog not fifteen foot behind."

"And what became of that deer?" asked 'Tilda Jane, unsteadily.

Lucas winked at his sons and concluded the story himself. "He run across our yard, an' among the bark pilers at Meek an' Sons' tannery. When the animal come runnin' down between the bark piles, some of the crew was for killin' him, but I was workin' thar, an' I wouldn't let 'em. He stayed round close to us all day, an' when any dog come an' sniffed at him, he'd run up close an' tremble, an' ask us to see fair play."

"You killed that deer," exclaimed 'Tilda Jane, bursting into tears. "Oh! why does God let men be so wicked?"

Sobs were almost tearing her little, lean frame to pieces. She had not worked up gradually to a pitch of emotion, but had fallen immediately into it, and Lucas and his sons stared wonderingly at her.

Poor little girl! She looked as if she had come through a sea of troubles, and pity stirred in the man's rough but not unkindly breast.

"Shut up now, shut up, missy," he said, soothingly. "We did shoot that feller, but thar warn't

nowhere to keep him, but deer has bin kep'. Soft now, an' I'll tell ye of Seth Winthrop, who has a park an' is a rich man. Las' year, when you couldn't go scarce five mile without seein' tracks o' blood in the snow where some one had been slaughterin', a moose was chased near Winthrop's place. He was so dead beat that he jus' stood an' trembled, an' one o' Winthrop's men put a halter on him, an' led him to the barnyard an' give him fodder an' drink, an' that livin' young moose is in Winthrop's park to-day, an' he weighs four hundred pound."

'Tilda Jane was still sobbing, and Joe nudged his father. "Tell her 'bout the bear, pop."

"Now here's somethin' that'll make you laugh," said Lucas, kindly. "It's about a bad bear that went an' got drunk. I was on a fishin' trip, an' I had a jug o' black-strap with me. Know what that is, leetle gal?"

"No-o-o," gasped 'Tilda Jane, who, rather ashamed of her emotion, was trying to sober herself.

"Wal — it's the State o' Maine name for rum an' molasses mixed, an' you take it with you in case you git sick. There was some other men with me, an'

they'd gone off in a boat on the lake. I had a gun, but 'pon my word I didn't think o' usin' it, 'count of gratitude to that b'ar for givin' me such a treat — just as good as a circus. Wal, I must tell how it happened. I didn't feel well that day — had a kind o' pain, an' I was lyin' on the bank in the sun, foolin' an' wishin' I was all right. By an' by, thinks I, I'll go to the camp an' hev a drink o' black-strap. I was mos' thar, when I met a wicked thief b'ar comin' out. Powers around, he was as tipsy as a tinker. He'd bin at my black-strap, an' I wish you could 'a' seen him. He didn't know where he was at, or where he wanted to be at, an' he was jolly, an' friendly, an' see-sawed roun' me, an' rolled an' swaggered till I tho't I'd die laughin'. My pain went like las' year's snow, an' I walked after that b'ar till he was out o' sight. Just like a drunken man he was, makin' for home, an' in the midst of all his foolery havin' an idea of where he'd oughter go. I'd 'a' given a good deal to see Mrs. B'ar's face when he arrove. An' didn't those other fellers give it to me for not shootin' him! I said I couldn't take a mean advantage of his sitooation."

'Tilda Jane's face was composed now, and with a faint smile she reverted to the subject of the deer. "Don't you feel bad when you're killin' them, an' they looks at you with their big eyes?"

"Look here, leetle gal, don't you talk no more 'bout them, or you'll hev me as mush-hearted as you be," said Lucas, getting up and going to the window. "At present I ain't got no feelin' about deer excep' that what's in the woods is ours. You jus' stand up an' try your feet. It's goin' to snow, an' I'd like to git you out o' here. Did you ever try to teeter along on snow-shoes?"

"No, sir," she said, getting up and walking across the room.

Lucas was anxiously surveying the sky. "'Pears like it was goin' to snow any minute. The las' thaw took the heft of it off the ground — you'd 'a' never got in this fur if it hadn't — an' we're bound to hev another big fall. It ain't fur to the road, an' I guess you an' Zebedee better start. Lemme see you walk, sissy."

'Tilda Jane tottered back to her seat.

"It's a smart trot home," observed Zebedee. "D'ye think she could foot it?"

"Pop, it's snowin' now," said Joe, who had taken his father's place at the window.

With almost incredible rapidity there had been a change in the weather. A small and sullen cloud had hidden the dreamy, thoughtful sun, and out of the cloud came wheeling, choking gusts, bearing bewildered snowflakes up and down, hither and thither, before allowing them to alight turbulently upon the quiet earth.

"That's quick," muttered Lucas, philosophically. "We'll hev to put off opinions till it's over," and he again sat down by the fire. The wind tore around the small cabin, furiously seeking an entrance, but finding none. Outside at least he could have his will, and his vengeance fell upon the sturdy young firs and spruces, who at his fierce word of command threw off their burdens of snow, and bent and swayed before his wrath as wildly as the most graceful hard-wood saplings. The older trees bent more reluctantly. They had seen many winters, many storms, yet occasionally a groan burst from them as

the raging breath of the wind monster blew around some decaying giant and hurled him to the ground.

'Tilda Jane pictured the scene without, and cowered closer to the fire. Gippie was on her lap, Poacher beside her, and this man with his two boys, who at present personified her best friends in the world, were safe and warm in their shelter.

Her dark face cleared, and in dreamy content she listened to the string of hunting stories reeled off by the two boys, who, without addressing her directly, were evidently stimulated by the knowledge that here was an interested, appreciative, and "brand new" listener.

CHAPTER XI.

A SUDDEN RESOLUTION.

THE storm did not abate. All day long it raged around the cabin, and the four prisoners talked, ate, and drank without grumbling at their captivity. When bedtime approached, Lucas addressed 'Tilda Jane in an apologetic manner. "Ye see we ain't used to havin' leetle gals, an' I'm afeard we can't make you very comfy, as my ole woman says, but we'll do the best we kin. This room's all we've got, but I'm goin' to try to make it two. See here," and rising, he went to one of the rough bunks built against the wall opposite the fire; "I'm a-goin' to drape ye off a place for yourself and dog," and, hanging a blanket on a hook by the fireplace, he called loudly for a nail to drive in the logs across the corner.

The two boys, who were playing cards at the table, jumped up, and presently 'Tilda Jane had a

snug corner to herself. Lucas had dragged out one of the fragrant fir beds from one of the bunks. The rustling of the evergreen inside reminded her of her narrow straw bed at the orphanage, and drawing the blanket over her, she nestled down and patiently waited for her friends to seek their equally fragrant couches. She was very sleepy, but she must not drop off until she had said her prayers. It never occurred to her to repeat them to herself. She must get up and say them aloud, and upon her knees.

After some time there was silence outside her screen, except for the heavy breathing of the sleepers, and the slow, deliberate crackling of the fire over the fresh wood heaped upon it by Lucas.

She crept quietly from her bed and knelt down. "Dear Father in heaven, I thank thee for saving my life. I might 'a' been dead at this minute if thou hadst not sent that good dog to find me. Please make me a better girl for being saved. I'll take good care o' that old man if thou wilt let me find him. Bless the red-haired man that owns this cabin. I guess he is a good man, Lord, but if he kills deer,

wilt thou not lay on his heart a coal from thy altar? If he was a deer, he would not like to be killed. Bless him, dear Father in heaven, an' his two boys, an' bless me an' Gippie an' Poacher an' keep us safe for evermore, — an' bless the lady-boards, an' the matron, an' all the little orphans, an' let them find good homes an' get out o' the 'sylum, — Lord, I will write them a letter as soon as I get settled, an' confess what is wickedness, an' what ain't. I don't want to be a bad little girl. I want to live straight, an' go to heaven when I die, but I'm sorry I had to begin in a 'sylum. It ain't a place for children what likes animiles. For Jesus' sake, Amen."

With a relieved sigh, 'Tilda Jane crept back to bed and went to sleep, quite unaware that her petition had awakened Lucas, who slept as lightly as a cat. She had waked him, and now he could not go to sleep. For a long time he lay motionless in his bunk, then softly getting up, he seated himself on one of the boxes before the fire, and let his head sink on his hands.

Years ago he had had a deeply religious mother. One who would rise at dead of night and pray

earnestly for her children. 'Tilda Jane's childish prayer had brought back this mother from her grave. What a good woman she had been! The dying wind, sobbing and sighing without, called to mind the camp-meetings that he used to attend when he was a boy. Churches were few and far between, and it was the event of the year for the scattered religious people to gather together under the pines for out-of-door services. He could hear the women singing now, — the weird sound of their voices floated down the chimney. Surely he was among them again, — that good, religious crowd.

He shook himself, muttered an impatient exclamation, and went back to bed. No, they were mostly dead, his mother was in heaven, and he was a hard, impenitent man. But his children — something ought to be done about them. This little girl had stirred these old memories — Zebedee and Joe must quit this life, and, with a snarl of determination on his brow, he turned over and fell into a profound and resolved slumber.

Early the next morning 'Tilda Jane heard some one stirring quietly about the cabin. She peeped

from behind the screen, and found that it was the father of the boys. He was making coffee, and taking dishes from a shelf to set them on the small table. He was also frying meat.

'Tilda Jane did not like to venture out until the boys had made their toilet, which they presently did by springing from their beds, drawing on their boots, and smoothing their thick locks with a piece of comb that reposed on a small shelf near a broken looking-glass.

When they had finished, she piped through the screen, "Will you please gimme a lend o' the comb?"

It was politely handed to her, and in a short time she made her appearance.

"Ho — deer's meat!" said Joe, sniffing joyfully. "Where'd you get it, pop?"

"Found half a carcass leanin' agin the door this mornin'," he said, briefly.

"Some o' the boys must 'a' left it on their way out," remarked Zebedee. "Hard blow to travel in. Gimme some, pop."

Lucas had settled himself at the table, and was eating with every appearance of enjoyment.

"Nop," he said, pausing, and speaking with his mouth full. "That thar is for you an' the leetle gal."

The boys stared at him in undisguised astonishment.

"Fall to," he said, inexorably, "eat your bacon and beans, an' be thankful you've got 'em. There's many an empty stummick in the woods this mornin'."

Joe, who was readier of speech than his brother, found his tongue first. "Ain't you goin' to give us any fresh meat, pop?"

"No, sir-r-r."

"You ain't got loony in the night, pop?"

"Y' don't calklate to eat half a carcass y'rself, do ye?" said Zebedee, with a feeble attempt at a joke.

"Nop — what I don't eat, I'll lug off in the woods."

"He's loony," said Joe, with resignation, and serving himself with bacon.

'Tilda Jane was silently eating bread and beans, and to her Lucas addressed himself. "Leetle gal, the storm's a-goin' to conclude accordin' to my

reckonin'. Kin you foot it out on snow-shoes this mornin' to the nearest house, do you s'pose?"

"Yes, sir," she said, quietly.

"An' you two boys will keep her comp'ny," said Lucas, turning to his sons. "I'm a-goin' to march on to Morse's camp."

There was a howl of dismay from Joe. "You give me your word Zebedee was to go."

"An' I give you my word now that you're to go," said his father, sternly. "In an hour I'll make tracks. You two wait till the last flake's settled, then take the leetle gal an' git her out safe an' sound to William Mercer's. Ask him to hitch up an' take her over to Nicatoos station, an' I'll settle with him. Then you skedaddle for home, git out your books, an' to-morrer go to school."

This time there was a simultaneous howl from the boys, and in the midst of their distress could be heard faintly articulated the words, "Pop — books — school!"

Lucas turned to 'Tilda Jane. "Yes, we're poachers, leetle gal, an' when I ask ye to say nothin' about what ye've seen an' heard here, I know ye'll

keep as mum as we do. I'm a poacher, an' I'm goin' to hev a hard time to give it up. They used to call me king o' the poachers, till another feller come along smarter nor I was. Anyway, I can't give it up yet. It's in my blood now, an' men as ole as I be don't repent easy. It's when ye're young an' squshy that you repents. But these two cubs o' mine," and he eyed his boys with determination, "has got to give up evil ways right off. Ye've got to go to school, sons, an' learn somethin', an' quit poachin', an' hevin' the law hangin' over ye all the time."

The boys looked ugly and rebellious, and, perceiving it, he went on. "Come now, none o' that; when ye're respectable, hard-workin' men ye'll be ashamed o' your father, an' that'll be my punishment if I don't get out o' this. An' you needn't kick, 'cause I'll lick ye all to splinters if I ketches one o' you in the woods this spring. Ye've got to turn right round."

"I'll turn right round an' come back," said Zebedee, bitterly and furiously.

Lucas got up, took him by the coat collar, and, without a word, led him outside the cabin.

A few minutes later they returned — both flushed — Lucas grim and determined, and Zebedee sulky and conquered.

"Air you also cravin' for an argyment?" asked Lucas, ironically, of Joe.

"I'm cravin' to lick you," said the boy, bursting out into a wild raving and swearing at him.

"Swearin' when there is ladies present," said his father, seizing him by the shoulder, and dragging him the way his brother had gone.

'Tilda Jane stopped eating, and sat miserably with downcast eyes. She felt dimly that she had made trouble in this family, and brought additional misfortune upon herself, for what kind of escorts would these whipped boys be?

Lucas's tussle with Joe was a longer one than the former with Zebedee had been, and not until after some time did he return. Joe hung about outside for an hour, then he came in, shaking and stamping the snow from him, and, as if nothing had happened, sat down and finished his breakfast.

Lucas, meanwhile, had been making preparations for his long tramp. 'Tilda Jane watched him with

interest as he took a sack, tied a potato in each corner, and proceeded to fill it with parcels of provisions.

When at last he sat down, took off his cow-hide moccasins, and began to tie on soft moose moccasins, fit for snow-shoeing, he addressed his two boys.

"When parients tell their children things air to be did, they ought to be did. When the children raves an' tears, they ought to be licked, an' when the lickin's over, the reasons come. Air you sighin' either o' ye to see the inside o' State's prison? Air you, Zebedee?"

"No, sir," said the boy, shortly.

"Air you, Joe?"

Joe, with his mouth full of beans, replied that he was not.

"Wal, that's where you'll land if ye don't quit breakin' State's law. Ye ain't either o' ye as clever as I be, but I've got to try to give it up, too. I've bin feelin' that ye'd git caught some day, and I've made up my mind, an' I'll hold it to my dyin' day. I'm goin' to crowd ye out o' this risky game. If I

ketch one o' you after deer agin, I'll give ye up to the warden myself. I swan I will," and he brought his hand down energetically on the table. "Now you go home an' go to school with smart boys an' gals till summer vacation, then ye can tell me what ye think of it. I'll not pretend I'll let ye out of it if ye don't like it, but I guess ye will. Ye've bin to school before an' made good progress, an' I asks yer pardon for takin' ye out."

Zebedee listened in quiet resentfulness, but Joe, who possessed a more volatile disposition, and who having satisfied his hunger was comparatively good-natured, remarked, "What'll ye do about Poacher, pop?"

Lucas's face darkened suddenly, and unhappily.

"Come here, ole boy," he said, and when the dog went to him, he bowed his head for a minute over him. "We've bin good friends — me an' you. Many's the trap I've led ye in, an' many a time my heart would 'a' bin sore if ye'd a bin caught. An' now, 'count o' my transgression, ye're a wanderin' sheep. Ye'll never git back in the fold agin unless some good sheep leads ye."

"There's somethin' you can't make over," said Zebedee, briefly. "He'll chase deer as long as he kin wag a leg."

"Leetle gal," said Lucas, suddenly, "would ye like to hev this dog?"

"To have him — that beauty dog!" 'Tilda Jane gasped, confusedly. "Oh, sir, you'd never give him away."

"I'd most as soon give a child away," said Lucas, "an' I'd never do it, if it warn't for his habits. Ye're a-goin' to Ciscasset, which is somethin' of a place, an' a ways from the woods. An' ye'll pet him an' kinder cherish him, an' keep him from frettin' an' bein' lonely. My ole woman don't set much store by dogs, an' when I'm workin' in the tannery he's off doggin' deer by himself. He's nearly got shot dead. See those ripples in his back? That's where he's bin grazed. Poacher, ole boy, you've got to go with this leetle gal, if she'll hev you."

'Tilda Jane hesitated, stammered, looked into the dog's anxious face, and the boys' protesting ones, and said at last, "But the ole man where I'm goin', mebbe he'll breach at my havin' two dogs."

"Prob'bly he will," said Lucas, "but you crowd right up to him. Folks is queer 'bout dogs. Them as don't like 'em don't want to give 'em standin' room on this airth, but you walk right up to 'em an' say, 'This dog has as good a right to a place on God's footstool as you hev, an' I'm goin' to see he gits it. If you was more like a dog yerself, ye'd be more thought of, ye cross-grained, cranky ole skillingsby' — come you, sons, quit that scowlin'. Do ye know why I'm givin' that dog to the little gal stid o' you?"

They uttered a brief negative.

"'Cause she knows dog language," said Lucas, dropping his voice to a whisper, and looking mysteriously over his shoulder, "an' if there was a deer here, you'd find she knowed deer talk. You, sons, is fond o' dogs, but not in the style the leetle gal is, or I be. It's a kind o' smartness at gettin' inside the animal's skin. He don't verily talk. Ye jist understan' him without talk — leetle gal, what's Poacher sayin' now?"

"Oh, he don't want to go with me," burst out 'Tilda Jane, with energy. "He's a sick dog. Look

at his eyes an' his droopin' ears. He don't want you to give him away. He don't want me to take him. Oh, I can't!" and she buried her face in her hands as if to hide temptation from her.

"He's got to go," said Lucas, stroking Poacher's head, "an' mind me, dog," and he put his hand under the dog's jaws and lifted them so that he could look in his eyes, "no runnin' away from Ciscasset. Ye stay with that leetle gal. Don't ye come chasin' round here, 'cause if ye do, I'll turn my back on ye for a runaway, an' ye'll feel worse'n ye do now when we part on speakin' terms. Say, is it a bargain, ole feller? Call him, leetle gal."

'Tilda Jane was overawed by Lucas's determined manner, and dropping her hands she ejaculated feebly, "Here, Poacher, Poacher!"

The dog looked at her, then pressed closer to his master, whereupon Lucas seized a stick by the fireplace, and struck him sharply.

Poacher turned his large brown eyes on him in one despairing, reproachful glance, then with drooping head sauntered across the room to the boys.

"Call him," said Lucas to 'Tilda Jane. "Speak up as if ye knew he was your dog."

"Poacher," she said, in a firm voice, "come here. You're mos' as unhappy as I be — we'll be unhappy together."

The suffering animal moved slowly toward her, and laid his head on her lap.

There were tears in his eyes, and the little girl groaned as she wiped them away.

CHAPTER XII.

FAREWELL TO THE POACHERS.

Lucas was ready to start, and 'Tilda Jane and the boys stood in the doorway watching him tie on his snow-shoes.

"Now, sons," he said, straightening himself up and drawing on his woollen mittens, "I'm goin' one way an' you another, but if ye act contrairy an' pouty to that leetle gal, I'll know it, for she's goin' to write me, an' if there's any complaint, there'll be such a wallopin' as these ones this mornin' would be a shadder an' a dream to."

His lecture over, he looked over his shoulder and narrowly inspected the faces of his two boys. They were reserved, almost expressionless. It might be a month before he saw them again. He forgot 'Tilda Jane for an instant, "Sons — ye know yer pop loves ye, don't ye?"

His tone had suddenly changed, and the two big boys ran to him as if they still were children. "Pop, can't we come back after we take her out?" they exclaimed, with backward jerks of their heads toward 'Tilda Jane. Their hands were on his arms, and they were roughly fondling his shoulders — these two unmannerly cubs of his.

"Sons," he said, in a broken voice, "I ain't been a good father to ye. I've got to spend the last o' my life in rootin' up the weeds I sowed the fust part. I don't want you to have such a crop. Now you go 'long out an' be good sons. Your mother'll be sot up, an' you mind what she says, an' I'll soon come home. Take good care o' the leetle gal," and passing his hand, first over one brown head, then over the other, he tramped away out of view among the snowy spruces.

The boys and 'Tilda Jane went back into the cabin. The two former sat together by the fire and talked, taking little notice of her. All their friendliness of the evening before was gone, yet they were not openly unkind, but simply neglectful. Toward noon the snow ceased falling, as Lucas had pre-

dicted, the sun came out brilliantly, and they began making preparations for departure.

Zebedee was to wear an old pair of snow-shoes that had been left in the cabin, and 'Tilda Jane was to put on his new ones. Her humility and unselfishness slightly thawed the boys' reserve, and when they at last started, her ridiculous attempts at snow-shoeing threw them into fits of laughter.

Zebedee carried the infirm Gippie, who otherwise would have sunk to his neck in the snow, Poacher soberly plunged his way along, while Joe assisted 'Tilda Jane in keeping her equilibrium. After an hour's travel, she had become quite expert in the art of taking wide steps, and no longer needed his helping hand.

"Air we mos' there?" she asked.

"In the span of another hour and a half," said Joe.

The hour and a half went by. They tramped on under the serene blue of the sky, and in such a solemn stillness that it seemed as if never a bird nor beast could have inhabited this white wilderness. Only the voiceless, silent trees were there, clad all

in white like ghosts of departed living things. But at last their winding way through the wood came to an end, and they stepped out on the old road. Here were evidences of travel. A few teams had passed by, and there were snow-shoe tracks alongside those of the sleigh runners.

The trees also grew more sparsely, and soon gave place to clearings, then the distant roof of a barn appeared, and finally a long, thin string of small farmhouses winding down a bleak road before them.

"Is this your home?" asked 'Tilda Jane, of the boys.

"Nop," answered Joe, "we live off'n that way," and he pointed down a road to the left. "But we've got to take you here to the Mercers', pop said."

He drew up before the first in the string of houses, — a poor enough place, and unspeakably chilling in its deathly whiteness. A tiny white house, a white barn, a white fence, a white cow in the yard, — white snow over everything.

"Looks as if they'd all died an' gone to heaven," thought 'Tilda Jane, with a shiver.

"Hole on," said Joe. "I'll run ahead an' see if

the folks is home. Ain't no smoke comin' out o' the chimney."

He swung open the gate, hurried in, pounded at the front door, pounded at the back door, and finally returned. "Guess there mus' be a funeral or somethin' — all off, anyway. What'll we do, Zeb?"

Zebedee shrugged his shoulders. "S'pose we go nex' door?"

"But them's the Folcutts," objected Joe.

"S'pose they be."

"Well, you know —"

"Guess they kin drive as well as Mercer's folks."

"What would pop say?"

"It's nearer than the nex' house."

"I'm kind o' tired," said 'Tilda Jane, politely and faintly. "Just drop me, an' you go back. I'll find some one."

"Nop," said Joe, firmly, "we promised pop."

"Come on," said Zebedee, "let's try the Folcutts."

They went slowly on to the next blot on the landscape, — this one, a low-roofed, red house with

untidy windows, and a feeble, wavering line of smoke rising from the kitchen chimney.

They all went around to the back door, and, in response to their knock a slatternly woman appeared.

"What you want, boys?"

"Pop says will you take this gal to Nicatoos station?" asked Joe. "He'll square up with you when he comes out."

The woman looked 'Tilda Jane all over. "The roads is main heavy."

'Tilda Jane leaned up against the door-post, and the woman relented. "I guess it won't kill our hoss," she remarked. "Is it the seven o'clocker you want?"

'Tilda Jane appealed to the boys.

"Yes, m'am," responded Joe, promptly.

"Needn't start for an hour yit. Come on in, boys."

"I guess we'll be goin' on home," said Zebedee.

Joe, for some reason or other, seemed reluctant to leave 'Tilda Jane. He carefully lifted Gippie to a resting-place by the kitchen stove, untied 'Tilda Jane's snow-shoes and strapped them on his back,

stroked Poacher repeatedly, and finally with a hearty "So long, little gal, let's hear from you," he made her an awkward bob of his head and ran after his brother, who had reached the road.

'Tilda Jane drew up to the stove, and, while she sat drying her dress, looked about her. What a dirty kitchen! The log cabin she had just left was neatness itself compared with this place. Pots and pans were heaped in a corner of the room, the table was littered with soiled dishes, the woman herself was unkempt, frowsy, and dispirited in appearance.

She was also cunning, for, while she seized a broom and stirred about the accumulation of dust on the floor, she inspected the little girl with curious, furtive glances.

"You bin stoppin' with the Lucases?" she asked, at last.

She had opened the door, and while she looked one way she carelessly tried to sweep in another way the pile of rubbish she had collected.

"Yes, m'am," said 'Tilda Jane, wearily.

"How's Mis' Lucas?"

'Tilda Jane paused to gaze out the open door. Why did not the woman shut it? And why, when it was so pure and clean without, did she not feel ashamed to keep so dull and untidy a house? If it were summer-time, and the ground were brown and green, this dun-coloured room would not be so bad, but now — the contrast made her sick.

"How's Mis' Lucas?" repeated her hostess, in a dull voice.

"I don't know," replied 'Tilda Jane.

Mrs. Folcutt poised herself on her broom and with rustic deliberation weighed the statement just made. Then she said, "She ain't gone away?"

"I dunno," said 'Tilda Jane, "I never see her in my life."

Here was a puzzle, and Mrs. Folcutt pondered over it in silence, until the draught of chilly air made her remember to close the door.

"Are we to start soon?" inquired 'Tilda Jane, after a time.

"I ain't a-goin' to take you," said her hostess, unamiably, "it's Uzziah — Uzziah!" and she went to an open stairway leading from the kitchen.

"What cher want?" came back, in an impatient tone.

"You're wanted. Passenger for the station."

A boy speedily appeared. 'Tilda Jane was not prepossessed in his favour as he came lumbering down the staircase, and she was still less so when he stood before her. He had his mother's sharp face, lean head, and cunning eyes, and he was so alarmingly dirty that she found herself wondering whether he had ever touched water to his face and hands since the winter began.

"Go hitch up an' take this gal to the station," said his mother, in feeble command.

He stood scrutinising 'Tilda Jane. "Who fur?"

"Bob Lucas."

"How much'll he gimme?"

"I dunno. He'll pay when he comes out."

"S'pose the warden ketches him?"

"He ain't bin ketched yit."

"He's goin' to — so they say at the post-office."

"I've got fifty cents," said 'Tilda Jane, with dignity. "Here it is," and she laid it on the table.

The youthful fox snatched at it, and grinned at his mother as he pocketed it.

"Say — that ain't fair," remarked 'Tilda Jane. "You ain't kerried me yet."

"She's right," said the more mature fox. "Give it back, Uzzy."

Uzziah unwillingly restored the coin to 'Tilda Jane.

"Now go hitch up," said his mother.

He sidled out of the room and disappeared, and Mrs. Folcutt's covetous eye wandered over 'Tilda Jane's wearing apparel. "Say, sissy, that's a pooty fair shawl you took off'n your dog. I always favour stripes."

"So do I," replied 'Tilda Jane, and, with a premonition of what was coming, she turned her head and gazed out the window.

"I guess you might as well square up with us," said the slatternly woman, seating herself near her caller and speaking in persuasive accents, "and then you'll not hev to be beholden to Bob Lucas. It's jus' as well for a nice little gal like you to hev no dealin's with them Lucases."

"That shawl ain't mine," said 'Tilda Jane, sharply.

This statement did not seem worth challenging by the woman, for she went on in the same wheedling voice, "You'll not hev no call for it on the cars. I kin lend you somethin' for the dog to ride down in. It's too good for wrappin' him," and she gazed contemptuously at Gippie.

'Tilda Jane drew in her wandering gaze from the window, and fixed it desperately on Poacher, who was lying under the stove winking sadly but amiably at her. Was no one perfect? Lucas hunted deer, this good dog helped him, his boys were naughty, this woman was a sloven and a kind of thief, her boy was a rogue, and she herself — 'Tilda Jane was a little runaway girl. "You can have this tippet," she said, sternly. "That shawl's got to be sent back to where it comes from."

"Oh, you stole it, did ye?" said the woman, with a sneer. "Well, I guess we kin hitch up for no thieves," and she got up and moved deliberately toward the door as if she would recall her son.

'Tilda Jane's nimble fancy ran over possibilities.

She had fallen among sharpers, she must be as sharp as they. Her offensive manner fell from her. "Look here," she said, bluntly, "I ain't got one mite o' money but that fifty-cent piece. If your boy'll drive me to Nicatoos right off, I'll give him that as I said, an' I'll send back the shawl by him. But if you don't want to do it, speak right up, an' I'll move on to the next house, and," she continued boldly as she saw consent on the cunning face, "you've got to give me somethin' to eat an' drink with it, 'cause I've got two dogs to take care of, an' I don't want to get to Ciscasset and tumble over from bein' fainty."

Mrs. Folcutt's gray face became illumined by a silly smile. There was not a shawl like that in the settlement, and bustling to her feet, she stroked it and felt it with admiring fingers, until admonished by 'Tilda Jane that time was passing, and if she was going to get her anything to eat she had better be quick about it.

The little girl almost choked over the sloppy tea from the venerable teapot, the shady bread and butter, and the composite dish of preserves set before her, yet resolutely shutting her eyes she

ate and drank, and forced Gippie to do the same. Poacher would touch nothing. "Don't ye know them huntin' dogs eats only onct a day?" said Mrs. Folcutt, contemptuously.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ATTEMPTED TRICK.

"How fur are we from Nicatoos?" inquired 'Tilda Jane of her charioteer one hour later.

"A matter of a mile," he replied, beating his disengaged hand upon his knees. He was sulky and cold, and 'Tilda Jane averted her glance from him to his small brown nag, who was trotting along as cheerfully as if there were a reward at the end of the drive for him.

He was a curious little horse. Surely there never before was one with such a heavy coat of hair. He looked like a wild animal, and with gladness of heart she noted his fat sides. The Folcutts might be mean and untidy, but they certainly were good to this faithful friend, and her mind went off in puzzled reflection.

She was pursuing the same line of thought of an hour before. No one was perfect, yet no one

was wholly bad. There was good in everybody and everything. Poacher was a bad dog in some respects, and she cast a glance at him as he came trotting sleek and thoughtful behind the sleigh, but what a noble character he was in other respects! Gippie was a crank, and she pressed closer the small animal beside her, but he had his good points, and he was certainly a great comfort to her.

Her heart was much lighter now that she was drawing nearer to the train that was to take her to Ciscasset, and in raising her little, weary head gratefully to the sky, she noted in quick and acute appreciation an unusually beautiful sunset. The colours were subdued — the sky was as hard and as cold as steel, but how clear, how brilliantly clear and calm! She would have fine weather for her arrival in her new home.

She was glad that she was not to stay here. She felt herself quite a travelled orphan now, and somewhat disdainfully classed this rough settlement as "back-woodsy." The houses were uninviting and far apart, the roads and yards were desolate. The men were in the woods, the women and children

were inside huddling around the fires. Middle Marsden was a quiet place, but it had not seemed as much out of the world as this. She hoped Ciscasset would be cheerful. Her travels had given her a liking for meeting new faces, and for enjoying some slight excitement. Not as much as she had had during the last few days — no, not as much as that. It was too trying for her, and she smiled faintly as she called up her last vision of her little careworn face in the cracked looking-glass in the log cabin.

"What's the matter?" she asked, abruptly.

The sleigh had come to a sudden standstill, and the boy was holding the lines in dogged silence.

"Why don't you drive on?" she asked.

"Now you jus' looky here," he replied, in a rough and bullying tone. "I ain't a-goin' one step furder. I'm mos' froze, an' the station's right ahead. You foller yer nose a spell, an' you'll git thar. Gimme the shawl an' the fifty cents, an' git out."

For one moment 'Tilda Jane sat in blank amazement. Then she looked from his dirty, obstinate face to the plump pony. The latter showed no signs of fatigue. He could go for miles yet. If he

had made a plea for the harness, she would not have so much wondered, for it was patched and mended with rope in a dozen places.

Then her blood slowly reached boiling-point. She had stood a good deal from these Folcutts. The shawl was worth five dollars. That she knew, for she remembered hearing the matron tell how much it had cost her. She had overpaid them for this drive, and she was not prepared to flounder on through the snow and perhaps miss her train.

Her mind, fertile in resources, speedily hit upon something. She must get this bully out of the sleigh, and she fixed him with a glance more determined than his own. He had on a rough homespun suit of clothes, and a home-made cap to match it. This cap was pulled tightly over his ears, but it was not on tight enough to resist 'Tilda Jane's quick and angry fingers.

Plucking it off, she threw it over a snake fence into a snow-bank, saying at the same time, "If you're goin' to turn me out, I'll turn you out first."

The boy was furious, but the cold wind smote his head, and, postponing retaliation, he sprang first

for his cap, shouting warningly, however, as he swung his leg over the fence, "I'll make you pay up for this, you — "

'Tilda Jane neither heard nor cared for the offensive epithet applied to her. With feet firmly braced, both hands grasping the lines, Gippie beside her, and Poacher racing behind, she was sweeping down the road. She had never driven a horse before in her life, but she adored new experiences, and she had carefully watched every motion of the young lout beside her.

He could scarcely believe his eyes. He gaped speechless for a few minutes, for the sound of the sleigh-bells had made him turn sharply as he was picking up his cap. Then he restored the covering to his head, ran to the fence, and bawled, helplessly, "Stop thar — stop! Stop!"

'Tilda Jane was skimming gaily around a turn in the road toward the sunset. He thought he heard a jeering laugh from her, but he was mistaken. Having got what she wanted, she was going obliviously on her way. The boy had been an obstacle, and she had brushed him aside.

"'STOP THAR—STOP! STOP!'"

With his slower brain he was forced to pause and deliberate. Had she stolen their rig? Stupid as he was, the conviction forced itself upon him that she had not. She could not take the rig on the train, anyway, and plucking up courage, and shivering in the cold that had seized upon him during his deliberations, he meditatively and angrily began to plod over the route that he had recommended to her.

Three-quarters of an hour later, he drew into the station yard. The train had come and gone, and his eager eyes went to the pony tied safe and sound under the shed, with not only the lap-robe over his back, but also the striped shawl — the first and last time that he would have the pleasure of wearing it.

At the sound of the bells when he turned the sleigh, the telegraph operator came to the station door. "Here's fifty cents for you, left by a black-eyed girl."

Without a "thank you," the boy held out his hand.

"I guess you don't like that black-eyed girl much," said the young man, teasingly.

"She's a — " and the boy broke into an oath.

"Shut up!" said the young man, with a darkening

face. Then with some curiosity he went on, "What did she do to make you talk like that?"

"Spilt me out," replied the boy, with another volley of bad language.

"You young hound," said the man, witheringly, "if she spilt you out, I'll bet you deserved it. I'll not touch your dirty hand. If you want your money, go find it," and throwing the fifty cents in a snow-drift, he went back into the warm station and slammed the door behind him.

Uzziah's troubles were not over, and he had still to learn that the way of the transgressor is a tire-some one. He fumbled desperately in the snow, for he wanted fifty cents above all things in the world just then, but he was destined not to find it; and at last, cold, weary, and yet with all his faults not inclined to wreak his wrath on the pony who stood patiently watching him, he threw himself into the sleigh and sped gloomily homeward. His mother had the shawl, but he had nothing for his trouble, for he counted as nothing and worse than nothing his experience of the maxim that one sly trick inspires another.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOME, SWEET HOME.

'Tilda Jane was in a quandary. She had boarded the train for Ciscasset, she sat up very straight and apparently very composed — her outward demeanour gave not a hint of the turmoil within. In reality she was full of trouble. She had not a cent of money in her pocket, and her new familiarity with the workings of the Maine Central Railway assured her that it did not carry passengers for nothing.

What was she to do? She pulled the little tippet more closely around Gippie's shoulders. She had taken it from her own, for it was absolutely necessary for him to have another covering now that the shawl was gone. Perhaps he would be taken away from her. She had noticed that it was not a customary thing for people to travel with dogs. His head and tail were plainly visible — this tippet was not like the voluminous shawl.

Lucas had not offered her money, and she had not liked to ask him for it. Perhaps he had not thought about it. Perhaps if he did think of it, he supposed that he was doing enough to get her to Nicatoos — and there was the conductor entering the other end of the car. She must do something, and deliberately rising from her seat, she slipped Gippie under her arm, and made her way out to the platform of the fast moving train.

It was quite dark now. She gave one side glance at the white, silent country they were passing through, then stepped into the lighted car ahead.

"This is a smoking-car, young girl," observed some one, haughtily.

'Tilda Jane had dropped into the first seat she came to, which happened to be beside a very stout and very dignified gentleman who had a cigar in his mouth, and who was reading a newspaper.

She looked round, saw that there were a number of men in the car — no women, no children, and that the atmosphere was a hazy blue.

"Smoke don't bother me," she said, almost scornfully. What was a breath of smoke compared

with her inward discomposure over her pecuniary difficulties?

"I'm in a little trouble," she said, brusquely, "I ain't got money to buy a ticket."

The gentleman gazed at her suspiciously. "I have no money for beggars," he said, and he turned his broad back squarely on her.

'Tilda Jane, for one so obstinate, was strangely sensitive. With her face in a flame of colour, she rose. Had any one else heard the insult? No, not a man in the car was looking her way.

"I'm a poor little girl," she breathed over the gentleman's substantial shoulder, "but I'm no beggar. I guess I work as hard as you do. I wanted you to lend me a dollar or so to be sent back in a letter, but I wouldn't take it now — no, not if you crawled after me on your hands an' knees like a dog holdin' it in your mouth," and precipitately leaving him, she sauntered down the aisle.

The gentleman turned around, and with an amazed face gazed after her. Stay — there she was pausing by the seat in which was his son. Should he warn him against the youthful adventuress? No, he was

old enough to take care of himself, and he settled back in his corner and devoted himself to his paper.

The only person in the last seat in the car was a lad of seventeen or eighteen who was neither reading nor smoking, but lounging across it, while he suppressed innumerable yawns. He was very handsome, and he looked lazy and good-natured, and to him 'Tilda Jane accordingly addressed herself. She had hesitated, after the rebuff she had received, to apply to any of those other men with their resolved, middle-aged or elderly faces. This lad she was not at all afraid of, and resting Gippie on the arm of his seat, she stared admiringly at him.

He straightened himself. Here was something interesting, and his yawns ceased.

"Well, miss, what can I do for you?" he inquired, mischievously, as she continued to stare at him without speaking.

He would lend her the money, she knew it before she asked him. There was something else in her mind now, and her little sharp eyes were full of tears.

"Is anything the matter with you?" he asked, politely.

She could not answer him for a few seconds, but then she swallowed the lump in her throat and ejaculated, "No, sir, only you are so pretty."

"Pretty!" he repeated, in bewilderment.

"Yes," she said in low, passionate, almost resentful tones, "you ain't got no 'casion for those blue eyes an' that yeller hair. I wish I could take 'em away from you. I'd 'a' been 'dopted if I had 'em. I wouldn't be standin' here."

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, courteously, and with a flattered air. He was very young, and to have a strange child melt into tears at the sight of his handsome face was a compliment calculated to touch even an older heart than his.

'Tilda Jane, with a heavy sigh, seated herself beside him. "I'm kind o' put out," she said, languidly, "you must s'cuse me."

After her interest in him, he could do nothing less than murmur a civil inquiry as to the cause of her concern.

"I've been tryin' to borrer money," she replied, "an' I was 'sulted."

"To borrow money — then you are short of funds?"

"Yes, sir," she said, calmly, "I'm a-travellin', but I ain't got no money to pay for me nor for this dog, an' his head an' tail shows this time, an' he'll be nabbed."

"Where are you going?" asked the lad.

"To Ciscasset, sir, if I ever get there. I'm beginnin' to think there ain't no such place."

"I assure you there is, for I live in it myself."

"Do you?" she ejaculated, with a flash of interest. "Do you know a man by the name of Hobart Dillson?"

"Rather — he was my father's bookkeeper for years. We pension him now," he added, grandly, and with a wish to impress.

'Tilda Jane was not impressed, for she did not know what a pension was.

"What kind of a feller is he?" she asked, eagerly.

"Oh, a sort of tiger — might be in a cage, you know, but we haven't got one big enough."

"You mean he gets mad easy?"

"Never gets un-mad. Always stays so. Is a regular joke, you know. Going to visit him?"

"I'm goin' to be his housekeeper," said 'Tilda Jane, with dignity.

The lad cast a rapid and amused glance over her small resolved figure, then taking his handkerchief from his pocket, turned his face to the window, and coughed vigorously.

"I can fight, too," she added, after a pause, "but —" slowly, "I sha'n't fight him."

The lad did not turn around except to throw her one gleam from the corner of a laughing eye, until she ejaculated uneasily, "There comes the conductor — are you a-goin' to lend me some money?"

His face reappeared — quite sober now. "Well, young lady, I am not a capitalist, but I think I can raise you a loan. How much do you want — that is, where did you come on?"

"I come on at Nicatoos, an' I've another dog in the baggage-car."

"Travelling with two dogs," he murmured, "and short of funds. You have courage!"

"I like some animiles better'n some people," observed 'Tilda Jane, sententiously.

"Your sentiment does you credit," he replied, gravely, and as the conductor approached, he held out his hand. "I pay for this little girl and her dog in the baggage-car."

"That's a fine hound you've got," the conductor observed, civilly, to 'Tilda Jane.

"Yes, sir," she replied, meekly. "I hope he ain't scared o' the train."

"He don't like it much, but some of the boys have been playing with him. Why —" and he drew back in surprise, "you're the obstinate young one I pointed out to the inspector the other day. Here — you needn't pay," and he put in her hand the money her new friend had just given him. "There was a great racket about you. You needn't have run away from Vanceboro — if you'd spoken the truth, you'd saved yourself and us a lot of trouble. However, I guess they'll be glad to hear you're all right."

"I'll be 'bliged if you'll give my respecks to Mr. Jack," she said, steadily.

"I'll do it," said the conductor, "and tell him you've picked up another dog," and with a wink at her companion, he passed on.

"Accep' my thanks," she said, after a time, handing the loose change in her lap to the lad.

"Keep it," he replied, generously. "I don't want it."

A grim flash like a streak of lightning passed over her dark face, and he added, hastily, "As a loan, of course. You may need money for your dogs. Old Hobart will begrudge them a bone, I assure you."

She thanked him, and thoughtfully tied the money in a corner of her handkerchief.

"Now if his son were home, he would be different. Hank is a rattling, good-natured sort of a fellow. No principle, you know, but not a tiger by any means."

"I'll thank you, sir, to keep a stiff tongue when you're talkin' of Hank Dillson," observed 'Tilda Jane, severely. "He's done me favours, an' you'd better keep your tongue off his father, too. If you're dyin' to pitch into some one, pitch into that selfish ole tub a-readin' that big paper up there. He turned

his back on me when I hinted round him for the loan of a dollar or so."

"And I'll thank you to keep a stiff tongue when you speak of that gentleman," said the lad, smartly, "for he's my father."

"Your father!" echoed 'Tilda Jane, in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Did he onct have blue eyes an' curly hair?"

"I believe so. He's a good-looking man yet."

"He's a—" began 'Tilda Jane, hurriedly, then she stopped short. "Law me — I'll never learn to forgive folks before the sun goes down; I'm gettin' wickeder an' wickeder. What's your name, sir? I'll want to send you this money soon's I earn some."

"My name is Datus Waysmith, and my father is the biggest lumber merchant on the Ciscasset River."

"Is he?" she said, wistfully, "an' have you got more family?"

"Yes, I have a mother as pretty as a picture, and three sisters."

"An' you have a nice room with a fire that ain't boxed up, an' you sit round, an' no other folks come in, an' no bells ring for you to get up and do somethin'?"

"We have loads of rooms in our house," said the lad, boastfully. "It's the biggest one in Ciscasset. You'll soon find out where we live. Here we are most in — Iceboro next, then home," and he flattened his face against the glass.

Outside in the dark night, bright lights appeared, danced over the snowy country, then disappeared. The train was running through the outskirts of a prosperous town.

"Is Ciscasset a nice place?" asked 'Tilda Jane, wistfully.

"Slowest old place that ever was. I'd like to live in Bangor or Portland. There's something going on there. We've nothing but a river, and mills, and trees, and hills — not a decent theatre in the place."

'Tilda Jane did not know what a theatre was, and discreetly held her peace.

"I say — here we are!" exclaimed the boy. "I hope mamma will have a good supper."

A shadow overspread 'Tilda Jane's face, and seeing it, the boy said, impulsively, "Stop here a minute — I want to speak to papa," and he rushed away.

The little girl sat still. They were going more slowly now, and all the men in the car were standing up, putting on coats and warm caps. She had no wrap, but her dress was thick, and hugging Gippie closer, she felt that she should not suffer from the cold.

The boy was making an animated appeal to his father, who was asking him short, quick questions. At last he gave him a brief, "Very well!" and the boy ran back to 'Tilda Jane.

"Papa says you can ride with us. I told him you had no one to meet you, and it would be cold comfort wandering about alone to find your way. He used to think a lot of Dillson, but you'd better not talk to him."

'Tilda Jane trailed slowly after her guide through the crowd of people leaving the train, and passing through the lighted stone station to the yard outside. Here were drawn up a number of sleighs. The boy led her to the handsomest one.

"Jump up on the box with Jenks," he said in a whisper. "Curl down under the rug, and I'll bring dog number two. He'll run behind, won't he?"

"I guess so," replied 'Tilda Jane, with an equally mysterious whisper, and she slipped down under the soft bearskin robe.

In two minutes the boy came back, leading Poacher by a small rope. "I'll just tie him behind," he said, "to make sure. "He's all right — and here's papa."

He stood aside, while his dignified parent got into the sleigh. 'Tilda Jane, from her high seat, looked around once. The lumber merchant and his son were down in a black valley of soft, smothering furs, Poacher was running agreeably behind, and Gippie was snug and warm in her lap.

No one spoke during the drive, and they glided swiftly through the snowy town. 'Tilda Jane had a confused vision of lighted shops with frosty windows, of houses with more sober illuminations, then suddenly they were stealing along the brink of a long and narrow snow-filled hollow. This was the Ciscasset River, still held by its winter covering.

She thought she heard a murmur of "rotten ice" behind her as the lumber merchant addressed his son, and she was enough a child of the State to know that a reference to the breaking up of the ice in the river was intended.

Presently they dashed up a long avenue of leafless, hardwood trees to a big house on the hill. A hall door was thrown open, and within was a glimpse of paradise for the homeless orphan. Softly tinted lights in the background illuminated and made angelically beautiful the white dresses and glowing faces of a lady and three little girls who stood on the threshold with outstretched arms.

The father and son welcomed to these embraces had forgotten 'Tilda Jane, and as the sleigh slowly turned and went down the cold avenue, tears streamed silently down her cheeks.

"Where am I to take you?" suddenly asked the solemn coachman beside her.

"To Hobart Dillson's," she said, in a choking voice.

Nothing more was said, she saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing of her immediate surroundings.

She had once been taken to a circus, and the picture now before her mind was that of a tiger pacing back and forth in his cage, growling in a low monotonous tone, always growling, growling at a miserable child shrinking outside.

"That there is Dillson's cottage, I think," said the coachman at last.

'Tilda Jane roused herself. Through her blurred vision a small house wavered at the end of a snowy path. She wiped her eyes hastily, thanked the man, and, slipping from her high seat, ran behind the sleigh and untied Poacher.

The man turned his sleigh and glided slowly out of sight. She stood watching him till he disappeared, then, followed by her two dogs went reluctantly up the path.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FRENCH FAMILY.

'Tilda Jane stood entranced. This was not the Dillson cottage, the coachman had made a mistake. She stood staring in the window, for this was a sight that pleased her above all other sights.

Here was another family, — a happy family, evidently, all gathered around a cheerful fire in a good-sized living-room. There were an old grandfather in the corner smoking a pipe, an old woman beside him with a white cap on her head, a middle-aged man cleaning a gun by the light of a lamp on the table, a middle-aged woman knitting a stocking, and a cluster of children of all ages about the grandfather, grandmother, father and mother.

Mingled with the crackling of the open fire was a very gay clatter of tongues speaking in some foreign language, and one boy's voice soared above the

rest in the words of a song that 'Tilda Jane was afterward to learn:

> "*Un Canadien errant,*
> *Bannis de son pays,*
> *Parconrait en pleurant,*
> *Un pays étranger.*"

She gazed at them until the sense of increasing cold checked her rapture, and made her move regretfully toward the door and rap on it.

It was immediately opened by a brown-eyed child, and held far back as if she were expected to enter.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Hobart Dillson lives?"

"*Ou-ay, ma'mzelle,*" murmured the child, bashfully hanging her head.

"But enter — it is cold," called the mother, rising and coming forward, stocking in hand.

'Tilda Jane felt drawn toward this alluring family circle, and one minute later was sitting in a chair on its circumference.

"But come in, dawgie," said the mother gently to Poacher, who stood hesitating on the threshold.

He came in, and was greeted silently and politely

by two respectable curs that rose from the hearth-stone for the purpose, then he lay down beside them, and gratefully extended his limbs to the fire.

'Tilda Jane sat for a minute looking about her without speaking. These people were not staring at her, but they were all stealing occasional curious glances in her direction.

"I'm lookin' for Hobart Dillson's," she said, bluntly, "but I guess there ain't no such person, for the nearer I get the more he seems to run off."

The mother of the family smiled, and 'Tilda Jane gazed in admiration at the soft black eyes under the firm brows. "I can tell you, *mademoiselle* — he is near by, even nex' doah."

"Oh!" murmured 'Tilda Jane, then she fell into meditation. These people were foreigners, poor, too, evidently, though perfectly neat and clean. She wondered how they got into the country.

"You air emigrants?" she said, at last, inquiringly.

"French," said the woman, "'Cajien French — sent from our country long ago. Our people went

back. We returned to earn a little money. Too many people where we lived."

"Did you come through Vanceboro?" asked 'Tilda Jane.

The woman's liquid eyes appealed to her husband. He shrugged his shoulders, looked down the barrel of his gun, and said, "It is a long time ago we come. I do not know."

"Mebbe they weren't so partickler," observed 'Tilda Jane.

"Let um do!" came in a sepulchral voice from the fireplace.

'Tilda Jane stared at the old grandfather, who had taken his pipe from his mouth to utter the phrase, and was now putting it back.

The house-mother addressed her. "Do not fear, *mademoiselle;* it is the only English he knows. He means 'all right, do not anxious yourself, be calm, very calm.'"

"Does he?" murmured 'Tilda Jane; then she added, unwillingly, "I must be going."

"Delay youself yet a leetle," urged the woman, and her pitying eyes ran over the girl's drooping

figure. "The children go to make corn hot. Marie —" and a stream of foreign syllables trickled and gurgled from her lips, delighting and fascinating her caller.

A little maid danced from the fireplace to one of the tiny pigeon-hole rooms opening from the large one, and presently came back with a bag of corn and a popper.

"And a glass of milk for *mademoiselle*," said the woman to another child.

'Tilda Jane was presently sipping her milk, eating a piece of dark brown bread, and gazing dreamily at the fire. Why could she not linger in this pleasant home.

"You know Mr. Dillson?" she said, rousing herself with an effort, and turning to her hostess.

"But yes — we have lived nex' him for so many yeahs."

"Do you think I can keep house for him?" asked 'Tilda Jane, wistfully.

The woman hesitated, laid her knitting on her lap, and thoughtfully smoothed her tweed dress. "You are young for that, *mademoiselle*, yet —" and

she scrutinised 'Tilda Jane's dark, composed, almost severe face — "if a girl could do it, I should think yes — you can. He is seeck, poor man. He walks not well at all. It makes him — "

"Like the evil one," muttered her husband, clutching his gun more tightly; "if he was a crow, I would shoot."

"Let um do!" came in guttural tones from grandfather's corner.

The woman laughed merrily, and all anxiety faded from her face. "Hark to *gran'père* — it makes me feel good, so good. No one can make us feel bad if we feel not bad ourselves. Deelson is seeck. He is not hap-py. Let us not be seeck, too. Let us be hap-py. *Allons mes enfants, est-ce que le* — " and then followed more smooth syllables that 'Tilda Jane did not understand.

She soon saw, however, that an order had been given to butter and salt the corn, and presently she was shyly but sweetly offered some by the French children. Even Poacher and Gippie had some kernels laid before them, and in the midst of her concern as to Mr. Dillson's behaviour, her heart swelled

with gratitude to think that she should have such good neighbours. Here all was gentleness and peace. She had never seen so kind a woman, such amiable children. Did they ever quarrel and slap each other, she wondered.

"It's getting late, ain't it?" she exclaimed at last, with uneasiness. "I must go," and she rose quickly.

"But you can stay all night if you desiah," said the woman, motioning toward the pigeon-holes. "Stay, and go nex' doah in the morning."

"No, no, I must not," said 'Tilda Jane very hastily, through fear that she might yield to so pleasant a temptation. "But can I drop in an' see you by spells?"

"But yes, yes — certainly, come often," said the woman. "Come at any hour," she said under her breath, and seizing 'Tilda Jane's hand in her own, "if it is not agreeable there, at any time run here."

"I'm 'bliged to you," said Tilda Jane, gratefully, "much 'bliged, an' if you want any floors scrubbed, or anythin' done, jus' you run over an' get me. I'll come —" and with a sturdy nod of her head, she took her dogs, and slipped out into the darkness.

"If agreeable leave your dogs here till mornin'," called the woman after her.

The little girl shook her head. "I guess he'd better see 'em right off. Good-night, an' thank you."

The woman clasped her hands, and, looking up at the sky before she went into the house, murmured in her own language, "Holy One, guard her from that terrible rage!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TIGER IN HIS LAIR.

The next house to that of the French people was larger and more pretentious than theirs. It had more of a garden, there were two stories instead of one, and the roof was surmounted by a tiny tower.

The outside of the tiger's den was highly satisfactory, and 'Tilda Jane smiled in weary stoical humour. Now to find the particular corner in which the tiger himself abode. The house was dark, except for one feeble glimmer of light on the ground floor. She had rapped at the front door, she had rapped at the back door without getting any response, and now she returned to the latter to see if perchance it had been left unfastened.

It had, and lifting the latch cautiously, she went in. She knew Mr. Dillson was an old man, she knew he was lame, and possibly he heard her, but could not come to her rescue. Passing through a

small porch where she stumbled against some heaped up pans, she turned the first door-knob she touched in passing her hand around the dark wall.

She found herself in a kitchen. The table in the middle of the floor, the chairs, the dresser, were all illumined by a feeble, dying glow in a small cooking stove, and by the beams of a candle struggling through an open door.

Poacher and Gippie crept after her as she proceeded slowly in the direction of this light. They felt that there was something mysterious afoot.

'Tilda Jane paused at the bedroom door. Here was the lair of the tiger, and there was the tiger himself, — an old man with white hair, red eyes, and a night-cap. A candle was on a shelf by the head of the bed, and a pair of crutches was within reaching distance, and the old man was lifting his head from the pillow in astonishment.

'Tilda Jane could not help laughing aloud in her relief. This was not a very dangerous looking person. He seemed more amazed than vexed, and she laughed again as she noted his clutch of the bedclothes, and the queer poise of his white head.

"'Scuse me, sir," she said, humbly, "for comin' this time o' night, but I thought you'd like me to report first thing. I hope you've heard from your son I was comin'?"

The old man said nothing. He was still open-mouthed and dumb, but something in his face assured 'Tilda Jane that he had heard — he had received some news of her, apart from the telegram sent by Mr. Jack.

"I've had lots o' speriences," she said, with a tired gesture. "I'll tell 'em some other time. I jus' wanted to 'nounce my 'rival, an' tell you I'm goin' to wait on you good — I guess I'll go to bed, if you'll tell me where to get a candle, an' where I'm to sleep."

He would tell her nothing. He simply lay and glared at her, and by no means disposed to seek a quarrel with him, she made her way back to the kitchen, opened the stove door, and, lighting a piece of paper, searched the room until she found the closet where the candles were kept.

The old man lay motionless in his bed. He heard her searching, heard the dogs pattering after her,

and a violent perspiration broke out upon him. Wrath sometimes gave him unwonted fluency of speech. To-night it rendered him speechless. He did not wish this beggar's brat to wait on him. Hank had not asked his permission to send her — had simply announced that she was coming. He was treated as if he were a baby — an idiot, and this was his own house. Hank had nothing to do with it. He didn't care if Hank did pay her. He had money enough of his own to hire a housekeeper. But he didn't want one. He wanted to wait on himself. He hated to have women cluttering round, and he lay, and perspired, and inwardly raged, and obtained not one wink of sleep, while 'Tilda Jane, having obtained what she wished, peacefully composed herself to rest.

First though, she calmly bade him "Good-night," told him to "holler," if he wanted anything, and, calling her dogs, went off in search of a bed for herself.

Beyond the kitchen was a front hall, — cold, dusty, and comfortless. Up-stairs were four rooms, two unfurnished, one having something the appear-

ance of a spare room left long unoccupied, the other smelling of tobacco, exceedingly untidy, littered with old clothes, fishing rods, bats, cartridge shells, and other boyish and manly belongings. This must be Hank's room, probably it had been occupied later than the other, and the bed would not be so damp. She would sleep here, and she turned down the clothes.

"Good land!" she murmured, "I wonder how long sence those blankets has been washed?" and she turned them back again, and, going to the other room, obtained two coverlets that she spread over herself, after she lay down on the outside of the bed.

The dogs had already curled themselves up on a heap of clothes on the floor, and in a few minutes the three worn-out travellers were fast asleep.

When 'Tilda Jane lifted her head from her very shady pillow the next morning, her ears were saluted by the gentle patter of rain. The atmosphere was milder — a thaw had set in.

She sprang up, and went to the dogs, who were still snoring in their corner. "Wake up," she said,

touching them with her foot. Gippie started, but something in the expression of Poacher's eloquent eyes told her that, although he had been apparently sound asleep, he knew perfectly well what was going on about him.

"Let's go and see Mr. Dillson," she exclaimed, and picking up Gippie, she ran down-stairs with Poacher at her heels.

"It ain't cold — it's just pleasant," she muttered, turning the key with difficulty in the front door, and throwing it open.

"Oh, my, how pretty!" and she clasped her hands in delight. Across the road was the deep hollow of the river. She was in one of a line of cottages following its bank, and across the river were fields and hills, now a soft, hazy picture in the rain. But the sun would shine, fine days would come — what an ideal place for a home! and her heart swelled with thankfulness, and she forgot the cross old man in the room behind her.

The cross old man would have given the world to have turned her out of his house at that very minute, but his night of sleeplessness and raging

temper had given him a fierce headache, a bad taste in his mouth, and such a helplessness of limbs that he could not turn in bed.

'Tilda Jane fortunately did not know that if he could have commanded his tongue he would have ordered her into the street, but she saw that there was something wrong with him, and as she stood in his doorway, she said, pityingly, "I guess you're sick; I'll make you some breakfast," and she vanished in the direction of the wood-shed.

He heard her chopping sticks, he heard the brisk snapping of the fire and the singing of the tea-kettle. He heard her breaking eggs — two eggs when he never cooked more than one at a time! He opened his mouth to protest, but only gave utterance to a low roar that brought Poacher, who happened to be the only one in the kitchen, into his room to stare gravely and curiously at him.

She made an omelet, she toasted bread, she steeped him a cup of tea — this slip of a girl. She had evidently been taught to cook, but he hated her none the less as she brought in a tray and set it beside his bed.

He would not touch the food, and he gave her a look from his angry eyes that sent her speedily from the room, and made her close the door behind her.

"I guess he'd like to gimme a crack with them crutches," she reflected, soberly, "I'd better keep out of his way till he's over it. Reminds me o' the matron's little spells."

If she had been a petted darling from some loving home, she would have fled from the cottage in dismay. As it was, although she suffered, it was not with the keenness of despair. All her life she had been on the defensive. Some one had always found fault with her, some one was always ready to punish her. Unstinted kindness would have melted her, but anger always increased her natural obstinacy. She had been sent here to take care of this old man, and she was going to do it. She was too unconventional, and too ignorant, to reflect that her protective attitude would have been better changed for a suppliant one in entering the old man's domain.

However, if she had meekly begged the privilege of taking care of him, he would have sent her away,

and as she was given neither to hair-splitting nor introspection, but rather to the practical concerns of life, she calmly proceeded with her task of tidying the house without reference to future possibilities.

The kitchen was the first place to be attacked, and she carefully examined the stove. It smoked a little. It needed cleaning, and girding on some old aprons she found in the porch, she let the fire go out, and then brushed, and rubbed, and poked at the stove until it was almost as clean outside as it was inside. Her next proceeding was to take everything off the walls, and wipe them down with a cloth-bedraped broom. Then she moved all the dishes off the dresser, washed the chairs, and scrubbed the floor.

Then, and not until then, did she reopen the door into the old man's room. Now he could see what a clean kitchen she had, and how merrily the fire was burning in the stove. It was also twelve o'clock, and she must look about for something more to eat.

Mr. Dillson had not touched his breakfast, so she ate it herself, made him fresh toast, a cup of tea, and

a tiny meat hash, then went up-stairs to tidy her bedroom.

The hash was well-seasoned, and the odour of onions greeted the old man's nostrils tantalisingly. He was really hungry now. His wrath had burned down for lack of fuel, and some power had come back to his limbs. He ate his dinner, got out of bed, dressed himself, and limped out to the kitchen.

When he had dropped in his big rocking-chair, he gazed around the room. The girl had done more in one morning than all the women he had ever employed had done in three. Perhaps it would be economy to keep her. He was certainly growing more feeble, and a tear of self-pity stood in his eye.

There she was now, coming from the Frenchwoman's house. She had been over there to borrow sheets, and a flash of impotent rage swept over him. He tried to have no dealings with those foreigners. He hated them, and they hated him. This girl must go, he could not stand her.

The back of his rocking-chair was padded, and before he realised what was happening, his state of fuming passed into one of sleepiness, — he was

off, soundly and unmistakably announcing in plain terms, through throat and nose, to the world of the kitchen, that he was making up for time lost last night.

When he opened his eyes, it was late afternoon, and 'Tilda Jane, sitting at a safe distance from him, was knitting an unfinished sock of his, left by his dead wife some ten years ago.

He blinked at her in non-committal silence. She gave him one shrewd glance, with her toe pushed Gippie's recumbent body nearer her own chair, and went on with her work. If he wanted to hear her talk, he could ask questions.

The afternoon wore away and evening came. When it grew quite dark 'Tilda Jane got up, lighted a lamp, put on the teakettle, and with the slender materials at hand prepared a meal that she set before the uncommunicative old man.

He ate it, rolling his eyes around the clean kitchen meanwhile, but not saying a word.

'Tilda Jane kept at a safe distance from him until he had finished and had limped into bed. She then approached the table and ate a few mor-

sels herself, muttering as she did so, "I ain't hungry, but I mus' eat enough to help me square up to that poor ole crossy."

She was, however, too tired to enjoy her supper, and soon leaving it, she washed her dishes and went up-stairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TIGER MAKES A SPRING.

The situation would have been absurd if it had not been painful. The next morning the old man was still in the same mood, angry at the girl's invasion of his premises, and yet so appreciative of the value of her energetic ways that he did not insist on her departure. And so day after day, for a whole week, 'Tilda Jane lived on, keeping house for the old man, but saying not one word to him.

He would not speak to her, and she would not begin a conversation with him. She prepared his meals from food that the storekeeper and butcher readily gave her on the old man's account, and exercised her tongue by talking to her dogs.

Occasionally she called on her French neighbours, the Melançons, and from them gleaned various items of information about the eccentric Mr. Dillson, without, however, allowing them to know that he would

not speak to her. This secret she proudly kept to herself. She found out from them that the old man was ordinarily in better health than at present, — that he was usually able to hobble about the house and wait on himself, for his temper had of late become so violent that no woman in Ciscasset would enter his house to work for him. Therefore, 'Tilda Jane's arrival had been most opportune, for he would have been in danger of starving to death if left to himself.

Feeling persuaded of this, and greatly pleased to think that she had been and was of service to the father of her benefactor Hank, her attitude toward the old man continued to be one of philosophical and good-natured obstinacy. She would not speak to him, but she was willing to wait on him in silence, looking forward to the time when he would find his tongue.

Her only fear of his sullenness was on behalf of her dogs. He hated them — she knew it by the menacing tremble of his crutches whenever the animals came within his reach. Therefore, her constant endeavour was to keep them out of his way.

She had made two soft, persuasive beds in the wood-shed for them; but it was cold there, and she could not stay with them. They loved her with all the strength of their doggish hearts, and wished to be with her every minute of the time.

Often at night she would start up in bed from troubled dreams of a fierce old figure mounting the staircase, crutch in hand. There was no lock on her bedroom door, and if the old man had a sudden accession of strength, he could easily push aside the barrier of a wash-stand and two chairs that she put across this door before she went to bed.

She wished that Hank would come home. He might persuade his peculiar parent to end this unnatural silence, and give her a chance to become acquainted with him.

"Mebbe he'll soon come, Poacher," she whispered in the ear of the dog who was sitting close beside her. "We'll make up our minds for that, won't we?"

The dog was sitting up very straight beside her, and gazing benevolently down at Gippie, who lay on her lap. They were all out on the front door-

step, and 'Tilda Jane was knitting industriously. It was a day like May in the month of March — there was a soft, mild air and a warm sun that made dripping eaves and melting snow-banks. Little streams of water were running from the garden to the road, and from the road to the hollow of the river, where large cakes of ice were slowly loosening themselves, breaking up and floating toward the sea. Spring was coming, and 'Tilda Jane, despite the incorrigible sulkiness of the person with whom she was living, felt it good to have a home.

"We'll have lots o' sport by an' by runnin' in the fields, Poacher," she whispered, lovingly, in his ear, "you ole comfort — always so sweet, an' good, an' never sassing back. You jus' creep away when you see some one comin' and don't say a word, do you? You're a sample to me; I wish I was like you. An' you never want to be bad, do you, an' chase back to the woods?"

The dog abandoned his stately attitude, and gave his tongue a quick fillip in the direction of her forehead. No — thanks to her intense devotion to him, he had no time for mournful reflections on the past.

"But I guess you'd like to see your master sometimes," she murmured. "I see a hankerin' in your eyes now an' agin, ole feller, an' then I jus' talk to you hard. You darlin'!" and throwing her arm around his neck, she squeezed him heartily.

He was boldly reciprocating, by licking her little, straight, determined nose, when there was a clicking sound around the corner of the house.

'Tilda Jane released him and raised her head. The old man was approaching, leaning heavily on his crutches. The beauty of the day had penetrated and animated even his ancient bones. 'Tilda Jane was delighted to see him moving about, but, giving no sign of her satisfaction, she rose and prepared to enter the house. He did not approve of having the front door unlocked, he did not approve of her habit of dodging out-of-doors whenever she had no work to do inside. She felt this, although he had never said it, and pushing Gippie into the hall, she stepped down the walk to pick up her ball of yarn.

The dog's enemy was some distance away, and seeing him leaning so heavily on his crutches, it did not occur to her that there could be any fear of

danger. However, with all her acuteness, she did not measure the depth of his animosity, nor the agility with which it could inspire him.

With a deftness and lightness that would have been admirable if it had not been cruel, the old man bore all his weight on one crutch, swung the other around in the air, and with the heavy end struck a swift, sure blow on Poacher's glossy black forehead.

It was all done in the twinkling of an eye — in the short space of time that the little girl's back was turned. She heard the crashing blow, flashed around, and saw the black body of the dog extended on a white snow-bank. His eyes were open, his expression was still the loving one with which he had been regarding her as she stooped to pick up the ball.

For an instant 'Tilda Jane felt no emotion but wonder. She stood stock-still, staring alternately at the old man and at the motionless body of the dog. It had occurred to her that he would kill one of her pets if he had a chance, but now that he had done it, the thing seemed unreal, almost absurd.

Surely she was dreaming — that was not Poacher lying there dead.

She went up to the dog, touched him with soft, amazed fingers, lifted the velvet ears, and put her hands on his forehead. There was the slightest ruffling of the smooth skin where the crutch had struck him.

The old man stood and watched her for a few seconds, his face a trifle redder than usual, but giving no other sign of emotion. He watched her until she lifted her head and looked at him, then he turned hastily and limped to the back door.

It was an awful look to see on the face of a child, — an avenging, unforgiving, hateful look, — the look of a grown person in cold, profound wrath. He did not regret killing the dog, he would like to dispose of the other one, but he did object to those murderous eyes. She was capable of killing him. He must get rid of her, and make his peace with some of the Ciscasset witches, in order that they might come and wait on him.

He went thoughtfully into the house and sat down in his usual corner beyond the kitchen stove.

He wondered whether she would give him any supper. He could get it himself to-night if she did not. He was certainly better, and a glow of pleasure made his blood feel warm in his veins.

Stay — there she was, coming slowly in — he thanked his lucky stars, looking very much the same as usual. He would not be slain in his bed that night. And she was getting fresh wood for the fire. Perhaps she would make hot cakes for supper. She was wonderfully smart for a girl. He had several times speculated as to her age. Sometimes when talking to the dogs she seemed no more than eleven or twelve years old. Ordinarily she appeared to him about fifteen, but small for the age. To-day in her wrath, she might be taken for seventeen. How subdued she seemed as she moved about the kitchen. He had done a good thing to strike down one of those animals. She would not have such an independent air now.

She built up the fire, set the teakettle on the back of the stove — he wondered why she did not put it on the front, and why she gradually piled on sticks of wood until there was a roaring blaze that

caused him some slight uneasiness. Was she going to set the chimney on fire?

No, she was not; when there was a bed of fiery red coals, she took up her tiny padded holder, lifted off one of the stove covers, then, to his surprise, went into the corner behind him, where he kept his crutches.

What was she going to do? and he uneasily turned his head.

She had both his crutches in her hand — his polished wooden crutches with the gold plate inscription. Years ago, when he resigned his position as bookkeeper at Waysmith and Son's big mill, a gold-headed cane had been presented to him, on which was engraved a flattering inscription. Nothing that had ever been given to him in his life had tickled his vanity as this present from the rich and prosperous firm had done.

When he had been obliged to put away the cane on account of his increasing bodily infirmities, he had had the gold plate inscription transferred to his crutches where he could see it all the time, and have others see it. Now — what was she going to do with those crutches?

"HE LIFTED UP HIS VOICE AND ROARED AT HER."

He opened his mouth, and for the first time addressed her. "Put those crutches down."

She paid less attention to him than she did to the crackling of the fire. Walking behind his chair, and making a wide circle to avoid his outstretched arms, she went to the other side of the stove and —

He lifted up his voice and roared at her. She was sticking the legs of his crutches down in that fiery furnace.

He roared again, but she did not even raise her head. She was holding the crutches down, stuffing them in, burning them off inch by inch — very quietly, very deliberately, but very surely. She was not thinking of him, she was thinking of the dead dog out on the snow.

He kept quiet for a few seconds, then he began to bellow for mercy. She was burning up to the cross-bar handles, she would soon reach that gold-plate inscription, and now for the first time he knew what those eulogistic words were to him — he, a man who had had the temper of a maniac that had cut him off from the sympathy of every human being he knew.

Tears ran down his cheeks — in incoherent words he stammered an apology for killing her dog, and then she relented.

Throwing the charred and smoking tops to him, she shut up the stove, took her hat and tippet from a peg in the wall, and clasping Gippie to her, left the house without one glance at the old man as he sat in the smoky atmosphere mumbling to himself, and fumbling over the burnt pieces of wood as tenderly as if they had been babies.

She had conquered him, but without caring for her conquest she left him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN SEARCH OF A PERFECT MAN.

Ciscasset, perhaps most beautiful of Maine towns near the Canadian border, was particularly beautiful on the morning after 'Tilda Jane's departure from Hobart Dillson's cottage. The sun was still shining fervently — so fervently that men threw open their top-coats or carried them on their arms; the sky was still of the delicate pink and blue haze of the day before, the wind was a breath of spring blown at departing winter.

It was still early, and beautiful Ciscasset was not yet really astir. Few women were to be seen on the streets, — only a score of shop-girls hurrying to their work, — but men abounded. Clerks were going to their desks and counters, and early rising business men to their offices. Market-men swarmed in from the country in order to be the first to sell their

produce in the prosperous little town with the Indian name.

Other towns and villages might direct their search across the sea for European titles for streets and homes. Ciscasset prided itself on being American and original. The Indian names were native to the State, and with scarcely an exception prevailed in the nomenclature of the town. Therefore the — in other places Main Street — was here Kennebago Street, and down this street a group of farmers was slowly proceeding. They had sold their farm produce to grocers and stable-keepers, and were now going to the post-office for their mail.

Assembled a few moments later in a corner of the gray stone building, and diligently reading letters and papers, they did not see a small figure approaching, and only looked up when a grave voice inquired, "Air you too busy to speak to me a minute?"

The men all stared at the young girl with the dog in her arms, the heavy circles around her eyes, and the two red spots on her cheeks.

"What do you want?" asked the oldest farmer, a gray-haired man in a rabbit-skin cap.

"I want to find the best minister in this place."

A smile went around the circle of farmers. They were all amused, except the gray-haired one. He was nearest to 'Tilda Jane, and felt the intense gravity of her manner.

"In the town, I mean," she went on, wearily. "I want to ask him something. I thought they'd know in the post-office, but when I asked behind them boxes," and she nodded toward the wall near them, "they told me to get out — they was busy."

The old farmer was silent for a moment. Then he said, gruffly, "You look beat out, young girl, like as if you'd been out all night."

"I was," she said, simply, "I've been pacin' the streets waitin' for the mornin'."

The attitude of the younger men was half reproachful, half disturbed. They always brought with them to the town an uneasy consciousness that they might in some way be fooled, and 'Tilda Jane's air was very precocious, very citified, compared with their air of rustic coltishness. They did not dream that she was country-bred like themselves.

The older man was thinking. He was nearer the

red spots and the grieving eyes than the others. The child was in trouble.

"Bill," he said, slowly, "what's the name o' that man that holds forth in Molunkus Street Church?"

His son informed him that he did not know.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Price," said the farmer, leaving the young farmers, and sauntering across to the other side of the post-office, where a brisk-looking man was ripping open letters. "Can you give us the name of the preacher that wags his tongue in the church on Molunkus Street?"

"Burness," said Mr. Price, raising his head, and letting his snapping eyes run beyond the farmer to the flock of young men huddling together like gray sheep.

"Would you call him the best man in Ciscasset?" pursued the farmer, with a wave of his hand toward 'Tilda Jane.

Mr. Price's snapping eyes had already taken her in. "What do you mean by best?" he asked, coolly.

"I mean a man as always does what is right," said 'Tilda Jane, when the question was left for her to answer.

"Don't go to Burness, then," said Mr. Price, rapidly. "Good preacher — poor practiser."

"Ain't there any good practisers in Ciscasset?" asked the farmer, dryly.

"Well — I know some pretty fair ones," responded Mr. Price. "I don't know of one perfect person in the length and breadth of the town. But I know two people, though, who come near enough to perfection for your job, I guess," and his brilliant glance rested on 'Tilda Jane.

"Who be they?" asked the farmer, curiously.

"Is it this young girl that wants 'em?" asked Mr. Price.

"Yes, sir," said the farmer, "it is."

"Then I'll tell her," said his quicksilver friend, and he flashed to 'Tilda Jane's side. "Go up Wallastook Street to Allaguash Street. Ask for Reverend Mr. Tracy's house. Any one'll tell you — understand?"

"Yes, sir — thank you; and thank *you*, too," and with a grateful gesture toward the farmer, she was gone.

The farmer gazed after her. "I hate to see a

young one in trouble. Someone's been imposin' on her."

Mr. Price felt sympathetic, but he said nothing.

"Who'd you send her to?" inquired the farmer. "I'd give a barrel of apples to know."

"To me?" inquired Mr. Price, smartly.

The farmer laughed. "Yes, sir — I'd do it. You've put me in the way of business before now."

"I sent her to a man," replied Mr. Price, "who might be in Boston to-day if he wanted to. He gave up a big church to come here. He's always inveighing against luxury and selfishness and the other crowd of vices. He and his wife have stacks of money, but they give it away, and never do the peacock act. They're about as good as they make 'em. It isn't their talking I care about — not one rap. It's the carrying out of their talk, and not going back on it."

"My daughter wants to go out as hired help. I guess that would be an A number one place, if they'd have her," observed the father, meditatively.

"Good enough," said Mr. Price, "if you want

her to ruin her earthly prospects, and better her heavenly ones," and he went away laughing.

The farmer stepped to the post-office door. 'Tilda Jane was toiling up the sidewalk with downcast head. The shop windows had no attractions for her, nor was she throwing a single glance at the line of vehicles now passing along the street; and muttering, "Poor young one!" the farmer returned to his correspondence.

The Reverend Mr. Tracy was having his breakfast in the big yellow house set up on terraces, which were green in summer and white in winter. The house was large, because it was meant to shelter other people beside the Tracys and their children, but there was not a stick of "genteel" furniture in it, the new housemaid from Portland was just disdainfully observing to the cook.

"You'll get over that soon," remarked the cook, with a laugh and a toss of her head, "and will be for givin' away what we've got an' sittin' on the floor. There's the door-bell. You'd better go answer it; it's time the beggars was arrivin'."

Mr. Tracy was late with his breakfast this morn-

ing, because he had been out half the night before with a drunken young man who had showed an unconquerable aversion to returning home. Now as he ate his chop and drank his hot milk, fed a parrot by his side, and talked to his wife, who kept moving about the room, he thought of this young man, until he caught the sound of voices in the hall.

"Bessie," he said, quietly, "there's your new maid turning some one away."

His wife stepped into the hall. The housemaid was indeed assuring a poor-looking child that the master of the house was at breakfast and could not see any one.

"Then I'll wait," Mrs. Tracy heard in a dogged young voice. The front door closed as she hurried forward, but she quickly opened it. There on the top step sat a small girl holding a dog.

"Good morning," she said, kindly; "do you want something?"

"I want to see the Reverend Tracy," responded the little girl, and the clergyman's wife, used to sorrowful faces, felt her heart ache as this most sorrowful one was upturned to her.

"Come in," she went on, and 'Tilda Jane found herself speedily walking through a wide but bare hall to a sunny dining-room. She paused on the threshold. That small, dark man must be the minister. He was no nearer beauty than she was, but he had a good face, and — let her rejoice for this — he was fond of animals, for on the hearth lay a cat and a dog asleep side by side, in the long windows hung canaries in cages, and on a luxuriant and beautiful rose-bush, growing in a big pot drawn up to the table, sat a green and very self-possessed parrot. She was not screeching, she was not tearing at the leaves, she sat meekly and thankfully receiving from time to time such morsels as her master chose to hand her.

The little, dark, quiet man barely turned as she entered, but his one quick glance told him more than hours of conversation from 'Tilda Jane would have revealed. He did not get up, he did not shake hands with her, he merely nodded and uttered a brief "Good-morning."

"Won't you sit here?" said Mrs. Tracy, bustling to the fireplace, and disturbing the cat and the dog in order to draw up a chair.

"I think our young caller will have some breakfast with me," said the minister, without raising his eyes, and stretching out his hand he pushed a chair beyond the rose-bush, and by a gesture invited 'Tilda Jane to sit in it.

She seated herself, crowded Gippie on her lap under the table, and mechanically put to her mouth the cup of steaming milk that seemed to glide to her hand. She was nearly fainting. A few minutes more, and she would have fallen to the floor. The minister did not speak to her. He went calmly on with his breakfast, and a warning finger uplifted kept his wife from making remarks. He talked a good deal to the parrot, and occasionally to himself, and not until 'Tilda Jane had finished the milk and eaten some bread and butter did any one address her.

Then the minister spoke to the bird. "Say good morning to the little girl, Lulu."

"Good morning," remarked the parrot, in a voice of grating amiability.

"Say 'It's a pretty world,' Lulu," continued her owner.

"It's a pretty world, darlin'," responded the parrot, bursting into hoarse, unmusical laughter at her own addition. "Oh, it's a pretty world — a pretty world!"

To the gentleman and his wife there was something cynical and afflicting in the bird's comment on mundane affairs, and they surreptitiously examined their visitor. Did she feel this?

She did — poor girl, she had been passing through some bitter experience. There was the haunting, injured look of wounded childhood on her face, and her curled lip showed that she, too, young as she was, had found that all was not good in the world, all was not beautiful.

The parrot was singing now:

> "'Mid pleasures and palaces, though we may roam,
> Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
> Home, home, sweet, s-we-e-e-t ho-o-o-me,'"

but at this point she overbalanced herself. Her uplifted claw swung over and she fell backward among the rose-branches.

The bird's rueful expression as she fell, her

ridiculous one as she gathered herself up, and with a surprised "Oh, dear!" climbed back to her perch, were so overcoming that the minister and his wife burst into hearty laughter.

'Tilda Jane did not join them. She looked interested, and a very faint crease of amusement came in a little fold about her lips, but at once faded away.

The minister got up and went to the fire, and taking out his watch earnestly consulted its face, then addressed his wife.

"I have a ministers' meeting in half an hour. Can you go down-town with me?"

"Yes, dear," replied Mrs. Tracy, and she glanced expectantly toward 'Tilda Jane.

The little girl started. "Can I ask you a question or so afore you go?" she asked, hurriedly.

"No, my dear," said the man, with a fatherly air. "Not until I come back."

"I guess some one's told you about me," remarked 'Tilda Jane, bitterly.

"I never heard of you, or saw you before a quarter of an hour ago," he replied, kindly. "Do you

see that sofa?" and he drew aside a curtain. "You lie down there and rest, and in two hours we shall return. Come, Bessie — " and with his wife he left the room.

'Tilda Jane was confounded, and her first idea was of capture. She was trapped at last, and would be sent back to the asylum — then a wave of different feeling swept over her. She would trust those two people anywhere, and they liked her. She could tell it by their looks and actions. She sighed heavily, almost staggered to the sofa, and throwing herself down, was in two minutes sleeping the sleep of utter exhaustion.

CHAPTER XIX.

SWEET AND SOFT REPENTANCE.

She was awakened by a hoarse whisper in her ear: "Get up and go on, get up and go on. Don't croak, don't croak!"

Her eyelids felt as heavy as lead, it seemed as if she would rather die than stir her sluggish limbs, yet she moved slightly as the rough whisper went on, "Get up and go on, get up and go on. Don't croak, don't croak!"

It was the parrot with the cold in her throat, and she was perched on the sofa cushion by her head. 'Tilda Jane raised herself on one hand. How weary, how unspeakably weary she was! If she could only lie down again — and what was the matter with her? Why had she waked with that terrible feeling of unhappiness?

She remembered now — Poacher was gone. She had not shed a tear over him before, but now she

hid her face in her hands, and indulged in low and heart-broken lamentation. Poor Poacher — dear, handsome dog! She would never see him again. What would the Lucases say if they knew of his untimely end? What should she do without him? and she cried miserably, until the sound of voices in the next room recalled her to herself.

She was in the minister's house, and she must get her business over with, and be gone. So choking back her emotion, she wiped her face, smoothed her dress, and, followed by Gippie, stepped into the dining-room.

The minister was seated by the fire reading to his wife. He got up when he saw 'Tilda Jane, gave her a chair, then went on with his book. After some time he laid it down. His caller was composed now, and something told him that she was ready to consult him.

He smiled a beautiful, gentle smile at her, and thus encouraged, she swallowed the lump in her throat and began:

"I'm 'bliged to you, sir, for lettin' me sleep an' givin' me some breakfus, an' can I tell you

somethin' 'bout myself? I'm all kind o' scatter-wise."

"And you wish some one to straighten you out?" he asked, benevolently.

"Yes, sir — an' I thought the best person would be a minister — they said you was the best here."

Mrs. Tracy smiled in a gratified fashion, while 'Tilda Jane went earnestly on, "I'm all mixy-maxy, an' I feel as if I hadn't started right. I guess I'll tell you jus' where I come from — I s'pose you know the Middle Marsden Orphan 'Sylum?"

The minister told her that he had heard of it. He did not tell her that he had heard it was one of the few badly managed institutions for orphans in the State, that the children were kept strictly, fed poorly, and were rapidly "institutionalised" while under the care of uneducated, ignorant women, who were only partially supervised by a vacillating board of lady managers.

"Well, I was riz there," continued 'Tilda Jane, "rizzed mostly in trouble, but still I was riz, an' the ladies paid for me, an' I didn't take that into 'count when I run away."

"So you ran away," he said, encouragingly.

"Yes, sir, 'count o' this dog, I said," and she pointed to Gippie, "but I guess inside o' me, 'twas as much for myself. I didn't like the 'sylum, I wanted to run away, even when there was no talk o' the dog, an' I'll tell you what happened," and while the minister and his wife courteously listened, she gave a full and entire account of her wanderings during the time that she had been absent from the asylum. She told them of Hank Dillson, of her sojourn at Vanceboro, and her experience with the Lucases, and finally her story brought her down to the events of the day before.

"When that ole man keeled over my dog," she said, brokenly, "that dog as had saved my life, I wanted murder. I wished something would strike him dead. But he didn't fall dead, an' then I thought it was time for me to chip in an' do somethin'. I took them crutches as he can't move without, an' I burnt 'em most up — all but a little bit at the top with the gold writin,' 'cause he sits an' gazes at it, an' I guess sets store by it."

"You burnt Hobart Dillson's crutches!" exclaimed Mrs. Tracy, in surprise.

"Yes, ma'am — 'cause he'd killed my dog."

"I wonder he had not struck you down," said the lady, with a shudder. "He is said to be a man with a very violent temper."

'Tilda Jane sprang up, her face as white as a sheet. "I mos' forgot. I s'pose he's sittin' there this minute. He can't move without 'em, an' nobody 'll go near him. Now, sir," — and she turned in desperate haste to the little, dark, silent man, — "tell me quick what I ought to do."

"You are a child with a conscience," he said, gravely; "you have been turning the matter over in your own mind. What conclusion have you reached?"

"Go on," said the parrot, hoarsely, and between intervals of climbing by means of bill and claw to the top of a chair, "go on, and don't croak. Don't cr-r-r-r-oak!"

'Tilda Jane turned her solemn face toward the bird. "Walkin' to an' fro las' night, a verse o' Scripter kep' comin' to me, 'Children, obey your

parents in the Lord — ' Now, I ain't got any parents, but I had lady-boards. I oughtn't to 'a' run away. I ought to have give up the dog, an' trusted. I ought to 'a' begged them to get me a home. I ought to 'a' been a better girl. Then I might 'a' been 'dopted. Ever sence I've run away, there's been trouble — trouble, trouble, nothin' but trouble. I've led another dog astray, an' now he's dead!"

Mr. and Mrs. Tracy exchanged a pitying glance. The child was intensely in earnest. Her black eyes were bent absently on the parrot who had fallen prey to an immense curiosity with regard to Gippie, and having surveyed him from the back of the chair and the mantel, and finding him harmless, was now walking cautiously around him as he lay on the hearth-rug. Presently, emboldened by his silence, she took the end of his tail in her beak. He did not move, and she gently pinched it.

There was a squeal, a rush, and a discomfited parrot minus three tail feathers flying to her master's shoulder.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, "my, my! What a fuss — what a fuss!"

Very little attention was paid her. Her master and mistress were taken up with the youthful owner of the dog, but Mr. Tracy mechanically stroked the bird as he put another question to 'Tilda Jane.

"And what do you propose to do?"

"I think I ought to go back," she said, earnestly. "I ought to say I'm sorry. I ought to say I'll do better."

"Go back — where?" asked Mrs. Tracy, eagerly.

"First to the ole man. I ought to be civil to him. I ought to talk, an' not be mum like an oyster. I ought to ask him if he wants me to go 'way. I ought to write the lady-boards an' tell 'em where I be. I ought to say I'll go back."

"Do you wish to go back?" asked Mr. Tracy.

A shiver passed over 'Tilda Jane's slight frame, but she spoke up bravely. "I ain't a-goin' to think o' that, sir. I've got to do what's right."

"And what about your dog?"

"Oh, Gippie ain't in it at all," she said, with animation. "He don't need to go. I guess I'll find some nice home for him with somebody as

likes animiles," and a shrewd and melancholy smile hovered about her tense lips as she gazed at her host and hostess.

"Poor little girl," said Mrs. Tracy, sympathetically; "we will take your dog and you, too. You shall not go back — you shall live with us."

As she spoke, her big blue eyes filled with tears, and she laid a caressing hand on 'Tilda Jane's shoulder.

"Please don't do that, ma'am," said the little girl, vehemently, and slipping her shoulder from under the embracing hand. "Please don't do anything homey to me. Treat me as if I was a real orphan."

"A real orphan," repeated Mrs. Tracy, in slight bewilderment.

"Oh, I want a home," cried the little girl, clenching her hands, and raising her face to the ceiling. "I want some one to talk to me as if I had blue eyes and curly hair. I want a little rocking-chair an' a fire. I don't want to mind bells, an' run with a crowd o' orphans, but it ain't the will o' Providence. I've got to give up," and her

hands sank to her sides, and her head fell on her breast.

Mrs. Tracy bit her lip, and pressed her hands together.

"Will you stay to dinner with us, my dear?" said Mr. Tracy, softly. "I will take you into my study where there is a fire and a rocking-chair, and you shall see some curiosities that I picked up in Palestine."

"Oh, no, sir, I must go," and she again became animated. "That ole man — I mus' see him. Tell me, sir, jus' what I am to do. I've been doin' all the talkin', an' I wanted to hear you. I guess I'm crazy," and she pressed her hands nervously over her ears.

She was in a strange state of nervous exaltation that was the natural reaction from her terrible dejection of the evening before. She had decided to make a martyr of herself — a willing martyr, and Mr. Tracy would not detain her.

"Go back to Mr. Dillson's, my dear; you have mapped out your own course. I do not need to advise you. Your conscience has spoken, and you

are listening to its voice. Go, and God bless you. You shall hear from us."

'Tilda Jane was about to rush away, but Mrs. Tracy detained her. "Wait an instant. I have something for you," and she hurried from the room.

CHAPTER XX.

WAITING.

Mr. Dillson had not passed a pleasant night. In the first place he had not been able to move for a long time after 'Tilda Jane's departure. For half an hour he had sat, hoping that she would return, or that some one would call on some errand. Without his crutches he was helpless.

Strange to say, he was not in a rage with her. Indeed, he had never felt more kindly disposed toward her, and he certainly had never so longed for a sight of her little thin, ungraceful figure. Just at the moment of the burning of the crutches he could have felled her to the earth, but after it was an accomplished fact his lack of resentment was a marvel even to himself. Possibly it was because she had saved the gold plate. Possibly — as minute after minute went by — it was because a peculiar fear drove all vengeance from his mind.

He had not liked the look in her eyes when she went out. Suppose she should make way with herself? Suppose she should jump into a hole in the ice, or throw herself in front of a locomotive, or do any other of the foolish things that desperate and maddened people were in the habit of doing? What would then be his position? Not an enviable one, by any means. He was partly — not wholly, for he had some shreds of vanity left — aware of his neighbours' opinion respecting himself. There was an ugly word they might connect with his name — and he glowered over the fire, and felt sufficiently uncomfortable until a strange and marvellous thing happened.

The kitchen was in an ell of the house, and, by hitching his chair around, he could command a view from the side window of a slice of the garden in front, and also of a narrow strip of the road before the house. He would watch this strip, and if a passer-by appeared, would hail him or her, and beg to have a new pair of crutches ordered from the town.

It was while he was sitting in the gathering gloom

watching this bit of highway, that the marvellous thing happened. Just by the corner of the house was a black patch on the snow, — the hind legs and tail of the poor deceased Poacher. The fore part of the body was beyond his vision. Dillson had no particular dislike for the spectacle. A dead dog was a more pleasant sight than a living one to him, and he was just wondering whom he would get to remove the animal, when he imagined that he saw the tail move.

No, it was only his imperfect vision, and he rubbed his eyes and moistened his glasses. Now the tail was no longer there — the hind legs were no longer there. Had some one come up the front walk and drawn the creature away?

He pressed his face close against the window-pane. No — there was the dog himself on his feet and walking about — first in a staggering fashion, then more correctly.

The old man eagerly raised the window. If the girl lived, and was going about saying that he had killed her dog, here was proof positive that he had not; and smacking his lips, and making a

clicking sound with his tongue, he tried to attract the resuscitated Poacher's attention. He must capture the animal and keep him.

It was years since he had called a dog — not since he was a young man and had gone hunting on the marshes below the town.

"Here, dog, dog!" he said, impatiently; "good dog!"

Poacher gravely advanced to the window and stood below him.

"Good dog," repeated the old man. "Hi — jump in," and he held the window higher.

The dog would not jump while the enemy was there. He would not have jumped at all, if he had been at the back door, for he would have smelled his mistress's tracks and gone after her. Now he suspected that she was in the house.

Though every movement gave him agony, the old man hobbled away from the window. The dog sprang in, and Dillson clapped the sash down. He had the animal now.

Poacher was running around the room, sniffing vigorously. He stood on his hind legs and smelled

at the peg where the hat and tippet had hung. Then he ran to the wood-shed door.

With a most unusual exertion of strength, the old man rose, pushed the chair before him, and breathing hard, and resting heavily on it, opened the cellar door. He would shut the dog down there out of sight, and where he could not run out if any one came in.

"She's down there, dog," he said, and the boldness with which he told the story so impressed Poacher, that after one inquiring glance which convinced him that his enemy's attitude had changed from that of a murderous to a semi-friendly one, he dashed down the steps into the cold cellar.

Dillson slammed the door, and chuckled. Now to get back to the window. He tried to hitch his chair along, but he was weak and must rest. He sat for a few minutes, and when the few minutes were over, he found that his muscles had stiffened. He could not move.

He sat a little longer. The fire went out, and the room got cold. He was so far from the

window that he doubted if any one could hear him if he shouted.

He lifted up his voice to try. He was as hoarse as a crow. He had a cold, and it was every minute getting worse. If he had the dog from the cellar, he might tie something to him and frighten him so that he would go dashing through a window. He began to feel that if the little girl did not return, he might sit there till he died.

His case was not desperate yet, however. He waited and waited. The night came and went, and another morning dawned, and the weather changed outside, until a stiff frost began to transform the thaw into a return of winter weather — and still he waited, but the little girl did not come.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TIGER BECOMES A LAMB.

Gippie was tired out, and in an execrable temper. He had had to trot home all the way from the Tracys, for his mistress was carrying a long bundle under one arm, and a good-sized basket on the other. And now that she was in sight of the house, she was fairly running, and he could scarcely keep up with her.

Her head was turned far round, she was looking over her shoulder in the direction away from the front of the house, and yet she went right to the spot where the unfortunate Poacher had fallen.

Gippie knew very well what all her emotion was about. Like some deaf and partly blind human beings, he was more aware of happenings than people supposed. Poacher was dead, and he was not sorry for it for he had been desperately jeal-

ous of him, and limping up to his mistress he impatiently whined to claim recognition.

"Oh, Gippie, what shall I do?" she moaned. "What shall I do? He was so good and gentle. I can't go in — I can't go in."

She was on her knees on the snow. Her hands were wandering over the depression where Poacher had lain. Her face was so pale and unhappy, that even Gippie's selfish heart was touched, and standing on his hind legs to reach her shoulder, he tenderly licked her right ear inside and out, until she brushed him aside with a half laugh, half sob, and a murmured, "You tickle my ear, Gippie."

She got up and moved slowly toward the back door, while the dog trotted along nimbly on his three legs after her. Why, what a vault! and Gippie shivered and turned his short-sighted eyes in the direction of the kitchen stove. It was black and cold, and the old man, sitting in the draughtiest corner of the room, right by the cellar door, was a dull, mottled purple. He did not speak when the door opened. He was morose and silent, and his whole appearance was that of a man in extreme distress.

Gippie was an excellent hater, and it did him good to see the old man suffer. However, he did not care to suffer with him, and squealing dismally, he planted himself near the delinquent stove.

'Tilda Jane's listlessness and painful depression were gone. With a quick exclamation, she had dropped her basket and bundle, and had sprung to the kindling box.

There was nothing in it. She rushed to the wood-shed, came back with a handful of sticks and paper, and by dint of extra quick movements had, in an astonishingly short space of time, a good fire roaring up the chimney.

Then she turned to the old man, who was still sitting in stony silence. "I'm 'fraid you're most froze, sir. Can't you come nigher the fire?"

Dillson's eyelids were swollen with the cold, but there was still room for a disagreeable twinkle to glimmer through. He would say nothing, however, and 'Tilda Jane, approaching the long, peculiar looking bundle, opened it, took out a pair of crutches, and handed them to him with a humble, supplicating air.

Gippie crawled farther under the stove, and, lowering his head, awaited developments.

But there was no danger of a blow from the old man. His hands were so benumbed that he could not hold the crutches. They slipped to the floor with a crash, and, opening his purple lips, he ejaculated the word, "Tea!"

"Ain't you had nothin' sence I left?" inquired 'Tilda Jane, sharply.

Dillson shook his head.

"You ain't been sittin' there all night?"

He nodded his head this time.

'Tilda Jane's face took on an expression of dismay, and she flew around the kitchen.

The warm atmosphere was now enwrapping the old man in a most agreeable manner, and when 'Tilda Jane handed him the big cup, he grunted something between an expression of thanks and a desire that she should hold it to his lips.

While he greedily drank the hot liquid, 'Tilda Jane, with a queer choking in her throat, addressed broken remarks to him. "I didn't know, sir — I was hopin' some one would come in — I was mos'

crazy 'bout the dog — I forgot all 'bout you till jus' now."

"More," he said, shortly, when 'Tilda Jane put the cup down.

She refilled it, then, as his hands began to get supple and he could manipulate it himself, she uncovered the basket Mrs. Tracy had given her.

"I didn't look in before," she exclaimed. "Oh, the beauty eggs!" and she carefully unrolled a napkin, "an' the white rolls, an' Washington cake, an' a meat pie, an' a tart — I say, grampa, we'll have a good dinner!"

The old man looked strangely at her, but she went on unheedingly: "They're jus' boss people. I'm glad I went an' talked to 'em — I'm sorry I was so ugly to you, grampa, an' if you don't want me, I guess I'd better go 'way."

She spoke quite humbly and naturally, and, as she did so, she raised her head and glanced in Dillson's direction.

He made no response, and she went on: "I've been a very bad little girl, but I'm goin' to be better, an' you jus' tell me what you want me to do,

grampa, an' I'll do it, an' if you don't want to talk, you jus' write it. I know you're a big man, an' mebbe you don't want to talk to a little girl like me, but I'll not lay it up agin you. You jus' do what you want, an' I'm not tryin' to come round you, 'cause I 'spect you'll send me off quicker'n a flash so soon as you get some one else."

Her lips were trembling, and her face was bright and expectant, but the old man gave her no satisfaction.

"Hand me some of that pie," he said, unexpectedly.

"Can you wait till I set the table an' make it look real pretty, grampa?" she said, coaxingly.

Dillson was nearly starved, and, without a word, held out his hand in a commanding fashion.

"All right, grampa," she said, gently, and she handed him a generous slice; "anythin' you like. This is your house. It ain't mine."

Dillson ate his pie, watching her meanwhile out of a corner of his eye.

"Bread and meat," he said when he had finished.

'Tilda Jane supplied this want, and earnestly watched these viands going the way of the pie.

"More tea," he said, when they were gone.

When he had eaten and drunk to an alarming extent, he pointed to the crutches. "Where did you get them?".

"I saw 'em in a window, grampa, — a great big druggist's window, — an' I went in an' said to the man, 'Can you trust me for 'em? I'll pay you, sure pop, if you'll gimme time. I'm goin' to be a good girl now, an' never tell no more lies nor steal, nor do anythin' bad,' but he jus' said ever so grumpy, 'This is a cast down, no credit system store,' but I wasn't cas' down, an' I said, 'S'pose you was a lame man, an' a bad little girl burnt up your crutches, how would you feel?' Then he looked kind o' solemn, an' said, 'Whose crutches was burnt up?' An' I said, 'Mr. Hobart Dillson's crutches,' an' he said, 'What girl burnt 'em?' I said, 'A little girl that don't know where to look.' Then he asked what you said when I burnt your crutches, an' I said you didn't say much, you jus' cussed. Then he turned his face round to the bottles, an' when

he looked out it was red, an' he was shakin' all over like as if he's been cryin', an' he jus' pointed to the crutches an' said, 'Take 'em, an' welcome.'"

Dillson's head dropped on his breast. This girl had evidently gone to Peter Jerret's store, — Peter Jerret who had owed him a grudge ever since the day he went in and denounced him before a store full of customers for overcharging him for prescriptions. Peter had actually dared to pity him — Hobart Dillson, and so had let the girl have the crutches, not caring whether he ever got paid or not. Well, he hadn't thought Peter would ever pity him, and, drawing his crutches toward him, Dillson cautiously lifted himself, and tried his weight upon them.

Yes, he could walk, he would go to bed, and think over Peter's conduct. It affected him, but he must not look soft. "Open my door," he said to 'Tilda Jane.

While she flew to obey his command, the old man heard a low whine near him, and remembered Poacher. The dog had recognised the girl's voice, and would soon make himself known. He might as well have the credit of his discovery. If she had come home sulky he would have allowed her to find

the dog for herself, but she was meek and biddable, and she had also secretly pleased him by addressing him as "grampa," in tones of such respect and affection. She had improved decidedly, and he exclaimed, peremptorily, "Here, you!"

'Tilda Jane ran out from the bedroom, where she was turning down the icy sheets in the bed so that the chill might be taken from them.

"Open this door," ordered the old man.

With a wondering air 'Tilda Jane threw back the cellar door. Then she gave a joyful scream.

There, standing on the top step, cold and shivering, half famished, but alive and well, was her beloved Poacher.

She tried to catch him around the neck, but he flew past her into the kitchen, came back like a shot, and, dashing up her back, licked her neck, sprang into the air, and again racing round and round the room, brought on what she herself would call a "combobberation."

The old man was so near, that Poacher, in his wild gyrations to and fro, swept one of his crutches from him. 'Tilda Jane, even in the midst of her aston-

ished and ecstatic glee, perceived this, and stooped down to recover the lost article, but she could not lay her hand on it, for the excited dog, with his head in the air and his tongue hanging out, made repeated dashes at her, beside her, behind her, — he was everywhere that she was. And Gippie was after him, for, snorting with rage and mortification at the resuscitation of his rival, he had bounded from under the stove, and, with his maimed tail wagging excitedly in the air, was biting, snapping, growling at Poacher's heels, nipping him fiercely, if by chance he paused a second to rest.

The noise and confusion were overcoming, and the old man, holding firmly to his remaining crutch, and grasping the back of a chair, grimly surveyed the scene. Finally 'Tilda Jane secured the crutch, and, pantingly brushing back her dishevelled hair, she passed it to him across the dogs' backs.

Poacher had now sunk on the floor at her feet, while Gippie was exerting his feeble strength in trying to crowd him away from 'Tilda Jane's stout shoes.

"Forgive us, grampa, dear grampa," she said,

beseechingly; "but it's such a joyful 'casion — such a 'casion. My heart never felt so big in my life. It's all swolled up. Oh, ain't you sweet to prepare this s'prise for me. When I come back jus' now I thought my pet was buried in the cold ground — oh, I jus' love you!" and, climbing over the quarrelling dogs, she seized the bunch of knuckles nearest her, and kissed them fervently.

The old man slowly uncurled his fist and looked at it. How many years was it since any one had kissed him?

He put the crutch under his arm, and turned toward the bedroom.

"Good night, grampa, dear grampa," floated sweetly after him. The girl was down on the floor with her dogs, her arm was around the hound's black neck, the three-legged atrocity was pressed to her side. She was happy, yes, happy — "as happy as a fool," he grumbled to himself. Nothing to annoy her, nothing to trouble her. Wait till she got older, and life's worries began to crowd around her, and with an impatient groan the old man flung himself down on the chair by his bed.

CHAPTER XXII.

A TROUBLED MIND.

'TILDA JANE and grampa were sitting out in front of the house. The spring months had passed, the apple-trees had blossomed, and the young apples had formed. With the changing season had come happier days for 'Tilda Jane. Little by little, as the weeks slipped by, a better understanding had arisen between her and "grampa."

He still gave way occasionally to terrible fits of temper and sullenness, but 'Tilda Jane understood him better now, and was quick to soothe and pacify him, or, if he was unmanageable, to keep out of his presence until he recovered.

Just now he was in an unusually amiable frame of mind, — a frame of mind so accommodating that it boded storms in the near future. However, 'Tilda Jane did not care. She accepted the present peace and was thankful.

She had dragged out his big rocking-chair for him to sit on, and had given him an evening paper to read, while she herself was curled up on her favourite seat on the door-step.

The old man was not inclined to read his paper, and dropping it on his knees he took off his glasses, put them in his pocket, and let his eyes wander to the apple-trees.

The river was flowing blue and open now, birds were singing, and all things betokened a fine summer.

"When you hear those robins sing, don't it feel as if there was a little string squeakin' inside o' you?" said 'Tilda Jane, gleefully.

Dillson made no reply, and seeing that he was in no mood for a sympathetic comparison of emotions, she diplomatically started another topic of conversation.

"I guess the birds make me glad, 'cause I'm so happy you let me bide with you, grampa — an' you've been so noble an' generous to lend me money to pay for the matron's shawl I took for Gippie. An' it was so kind in the lady-boards to write back that they was glad to get rid of me."

"'THEY WAS GLAD TO GET RID OF ME.'"

The old man laughed a toothless laugh at her whimsical view of the lady-boards' reply, but said nothing.

"I ain't told you much of my travels yet, grampa," she said, agreeably. "I've been so busy house-cleanin'. I guess you'd like to hear about Vanceboro."

The old man did not display any particular interest in Vanceboro, but having assured herself by a swift examination of his features that the subject was not disagreeable to him, she went on, "It's a great ole place. I'd like you to go there sometime, grampa. Such goings-on with them furriners! I saw one woman walkin' up and down wringin' her hands an' cryin' 'cause they wouldn't let her bring her ole mother into this nation."

She waited for her hearer to ask why the mother was forbidden to come where the daughter could enter, but he did not do so, and she continued, "She was a poor woman from Boston, an' her mother was a poor woman from Canada, an' they said if she come in 'twould be two poor women together, an' first thing they knowed they'd be

both in the poorhouse. So her mother had to go back to Canada."

Dillson looked entirely uninterested in the case of the would-be immigrant, so, after a farewell announcement that sometimes as many as two hundred "furriners" went through Vanceboro in a single day, 'Tilda Jane passed on to another branch of her subject.

"It's a reg'lar jubilee, grampa, when the trains come in — a boy runnin' to a big bell an' ringin' it, an' people pourin' into the lunch-room, an' jus' chasin' the food into their mouths an' lookin' hunted-like, as if there was somethin' after them, an' some don't take time to go to the tables. They step up to the lunch-counter, which is shaped jus' like a moon when it ain't full. There's glass dishes on it, with oranges, an' bananas, an' cakes an' pies, an' sangwiches, an' a funny machine where you drop a nickel in a crack, an' if the hand points to five, or ten or fifteen, you get twenty-five cents' worth of candy, an' if you don't get candy you get good advice like as, 'You've been keepin' bad comp'ny, quit it or you will never prosper,' or 'You've run

away from home, an' the perlice is on your track,' or 'Smokin is a bad thing for your health.'"

Grampa was not very much interested, so 'Tilda Jane tried something more startling.

"There's great talk of railroad accidents there. Men get killed awful. I heard a table-girl ask a brakeman how he could go on a train for fear he'd be hurt, an' he said he dassent stop to think, he had to take chances. I used to see 'em runnin' like cats on top o' them cars, slippery with snow an' ice. If you're inside one o' them cars, grampa, an' there's goin' to be a turnover, jus' grip hard on somethin' steady, 'cause then you're not so apt to get killed. I heard a conductor say that."

Grampa's travelling days were over, yet it pleased him to be talked to as if he were still a strong and active man, and he said, shortly, "I'm not likely to be going far from home."

"You don't know, grampa," she said, soothingly. "Some day when you get nice and well, I'd like to travel with you, but first you must be very quiet like one of Job's mice, an' not have anythin' gnawin' at you—I guess you've had lots of plague times in your life."

Grampa looked unheedingly beyond her to the apple-trees.

Her face was shrewd and puckered, and she was surveying him like a cunning little cat.

"Sometimes, grampa, I hear you fussin' in your sleep — moanin' an' cryin' like a poor dog what's lost her pups."

The old man turned and looked at her sharply.

She went on boldly, "Can I lie in my soft, warm bed up-stairs an' you a-sufferin'? No, I creepy, creepy down, to see if I can do anythin'."

"Don't you do that again," said the old man, his face becoming red. "You stay in your bed at night."

"All right, grampa," she said, meekly, "but I've heard things already."

"Things — what things?" he asked, sharply.

'Tilda Jane folded together the apron she was hemming, and getting up, opened a door of retreat behind her into the house.

"About losin' that money," she said, sadly. She paused, and as he neither spoke or made any motion

to throw a crutch at her, she proceeded, "Grampa, I jus' know it's like a little pain hawk pickin' at your skin."

Grampa was still silent, painfully so, and she hurried on, "You haven't got much money, an' you have me an' the dogs to take care of. Now, grampa, won't you let me get some work to do outside to help us?" and she screwed her features into their most persuasive appearance.

Grampa had his head turned away over his shoulder, and when he after a long time twisted it around, 'Tilda Jane rose, and prudently and swiftly retired into the hall.

He must be in a rage. His face was fiery, and he was making a choking, spluttering sound in his throat, — a sound that only came from him in moments of agitation.

"Don't you — don't you," he stammered, "spy on me again, and bother your young head about things you know nothing of. Do you hear?" and he accentuated his remarks by a tap of his crutch on the door-step. "I've had a way all my life of talking over things in my sleep. And you've got

enough to do at home. I'll not have you working for other people."

"All right, grampa," said 'Tilda Jane, submissively, and she made a step toward him. She had planned to fly through the hall to his bedroom, and remove his wash bowl and pitcher, for since she had come to the cottage he had broken several in his fits of rage.

But grampa was not angry in a violent way this time. "He's more bothered than mad," she murmured, dispiritedly, and she drew aside to allow him to pass by her into the house.

"The dew's falling," he muttered, as he went by her. "I'll go sit in the kitchen a spell."

'Tilda Jane went mournfully to sit under the trees on a wooden bench that grampa had had made for her. The two dogs curled themselves up at her feet, and with a sigh she picked up a writing pad beside her. It was almost too dark to see the lines, but she must finish a letter that she had begun to write to Hank.

His former custom had been to scratch a line to his father once in six months to say he was alive

and well, but since 'Tilda Jane's arrival he had written every week, and had addressed his letters to her.

It was a great pleasure to the little girl to get these letters, and an equal pleasure to answer them. She related to him every occurrence of her daily life, all details of his father's conduct except disagreeable ones, and her letters always ended with an urgent request that he would come and visit them.

This evening she had as usual made an appeal at the end of her letter. "Dear Mr. Hank, it seems a long time sence the snow was on the ground. I guess if you knew how much we want to see you you'd come hurryin' home. The dogs send love, Gippie specially 'cause he knows you. Poacher says he'd be happy to make your acquaintance — and, Mr. Hank, your father's kind of worried about somethin'. I guess he'd like to see you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

WHILE 'Tilda Jane wrote, Poacher suddenly made a stealthy movement, and Gippie, deaf as he was, had enough of the dog spirit left in him to know that some one was coming, and to elevate the tiny V-shaped flaps over his ears.

The gate clicked, there was a rustling along the ribbon-grass bordering the narrow path, and then 'Tilda Jane's writing-pad fell to the ground, and she sprang up with a delighted scream.

For peering forward in the gathering gloom, she discovered Hank, the long-absent Hank, moving heavily and awkwardly up the path toward her.

He had grown thin; his clothes hung loosely on him, and he was pale and worried in appearance, but 'Tilda Jane did not criticise him. He was the person who had most helped her in her search for a home, and, springing toward him, she caught his

arm and ejaculated: "Oh, Hank! Mr. Hank — is it truly you I'm pinchin', or is it a ghost?"

He smiled faintly, and, in return, pinched her cheek. "I ain't a ghost yet, though 'pon my word I didn't know but what I'd soon be one." As he spoke, he threw himself wearily on the seat. "Well, 'Tilda, how does Ciscasset treat you? Coronation! You're getting fat," and he scanned her in satisfaction. "I wouldn't know you for the little runaway that held me up last March out at Marsden."

"I guess I'm gettin' fat 'cause I'm peaceful in my mind," said 'Tilda Jane, demurely; "I don't have no one to fight. I'm jus' havin' the softest time!"

"So father really treats you well?"

"Of course — don't I write you? He's jus' as sweet as a peach. He lets me wash, an' scrub, an' cook, an' never says a word excep' not to work too hard, an' if he wants to be jus' a little bit cranky, jus' a teeny little bit, he goes in his room an' shuts the door till the bad spirit gets out of him."

"Did he ever hurt you?"

"No, he never struck me — he usen't to like the dogs."

Hank had never been told of Poacher's adventure, but his attention wandered to the dog, and he absently stroked his head.

"You've done the old man a lot of good," he said at last.

"I — no, sir," said 'Tilda Jane, earnestly. "I guess it's the dogs. But he wants more good done to him. He's in a regular slouch of despond sometimes, Mr. Hank."

"Is he?" said the young man, listlessly; "what's he desponding about?"

"About money, Mr. Hank. He lost some in the street, and never got it back — then it costs something to keep me and the dogs. I feel dreadful about it. I try to eat jus' as little as possible, but I'm as hungry as a bear mos' all the time."

Hank's attention was aroused. "You must not stent yourself, sissy. This is too bad. I'm to blame. I've been intending to send you some money, but I've had a run of bad luck."

His face was so disturbed that 'Tilda Jane made haste to change the subject.

"Oh, I'm so worked up to see you — I'm perfectly 'tossicated. I feel jus' like the teakettle afore it boils, an' that 'minds me — I mus' go set it on. You mus' he starvin'."

"No, I ain't hungry; I haven't had an appetite for a week. How much did father lose?"

"Sixty dollars," said the little girl, reluctantly.

Hank relapsed into silence after this information. He was evidently not inclined to talk, but 'Tilda Jane was brimful of questions, and presently burst out with one of them.

"Mr. Hank, what did you do with that beauty horse of yours?"

"Had to sell it," he said, bitterly. "I've lost everything I had. Those farmers are all against me. Every potato top among them. I'm played out in this State. They'd like to jail me if they could."

"Jail you," said 'Tilda Jane, resentfully, "I guess I'd come and pound at the door of the jail if they did."

"You ought to pound," said Hank, in an ungrate

ful and ungallant tone, "'cause I ain't had a mite of luck since you crossed my path."

'Tilda Jane fell into blank astonishment for the space of one minute, then she asked, wistfully, "Do you mean that — did I truly bring you bad luck?"

"You truly did," he said, peevishly. "I'm all broken up in my business, cleaned out, done for."

'Tilda Jane pushed the hair back from her forehead with a bewildered gesture. Her benefactor was in trouble — perhaps ruined, and through her. But this was no time for reflection, the urgency of the case demanded action.

"Mr. Hank," she said, softly, "warn't it a roguey kind of a business, anyway?"

"All business is roguey," he said, gruffly.

"I guess you don't mean that," she said, mildly. "I know you don't mean that I've done you harm. I guess you're jus' in trouble like the river in the spring, when the ice goes mixy-maxy every way."

He smiled slightly as he rose, and looked down into the shrewd little face, "Well, ta, ta, 'Tilda — be a good girl."

"Where are you goin'?" she asked, helplessly.

"Blest if I know — somewhere to earn a living, to Canada, maybe."

"Don't you go through Vanceboro," she said, sharply, then she pressed her hands to her head. "I think I'm crazy — are you Hank Dillson, standin' there sayin' you're goin' to leave us like this?"

"Don't take on, 'Tilda," he said, consolingly. "I'm real sorry. I wouldn't have come out of my way this much if I hadn't promised you, and if you hadn't been such a nice little girl. Of course you haven't hurt me. I guess you've done me good, for I've had a kind of disgust with my business ever since you set foot in my life."

She paid no attention to the latter part of his speech. "You say you've got to go, an' I can't keep you," she murmured, stupidly, "an' you don't know where you're goin'."

"I don't know, an' I don't want to know. I'll loaf along till my money gives out, then I'll go to work."

"Hank, do you think of Orstralia?"

"No, I ain't got dough enough to get that far."

"Do you mean bread?"

"No, I mean cash."

"Why don't you stay here?"

"Nothing to do that I know of. This is a one-horse place."

"Hank, you ain't seen your father," she cried, catching at his coat sleeve, as he turned toward the gate.

"'Pon my word, I forgot the old man. I believe I'll go in for sixty seconds. You say his health's better?"

"Yes," said 'Tilda Jane, hurriedly, "I didn't write you that he had a fit not long sence, and it seemed to straighten him out. He goes to town on his crutches every day, an' Gippie limps after him — oh, Hank Dillson, Hank Dillson, I'm mos' loony about this business of your goin' away."

Hank smiled wearily at her, and went slowly toward the house.

"How long can you stay?" she asked, running after him. "How long will you give us?"

He took out his watch, and held it close to his face. "I guess I'll take the eleven o'clock train.

It's nine now — I thought I'd look up some of the boys."

"Give us all the time," she said, pleadingly, "stay with your father an' me. Oh, promise, will you?"

"All right," he said, obligingly. "I don't care if I do. I'm beat out, anyway."

"I have to go some place, but I'll be back soon," she called after him, then she threw up both hands and pressed them over her ears, — a favourite gesture with her when she was doing hard thinking.

"Mr. Waysmith or Mr. Tracy," she repeated, half aloud. "Mr. Waysmith or Mr. Tracy. Mr. Tracy," she said, at last, "he's most likely," and whirling on her heel, she flew down the path, out the gate, and into the street.

Poacher, silent, graceful, and swift, kept close to her, but the battered Gippie soon gave up the chase with a howl of protest, and went limping home.

Hank, to his surprise, had, on the whole, the most agreeable talk of his life with his father. The old man was altered. He had been, at the same time, the stiffest and the most demonstrative

of parents, the young man reflected. There really was a remarkable change for the better in him, and yet, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, Hank got up to take his leave.

They were nearly always absent from each other, they had got out of the way of taking an active interest in each other's concerns — there was not yet sufficiently firm footing and enough of it to bridge to the shaky background of the past, and parting would be a mutual relief.

Yet the old man's eyes twinkled wistfully as they followed his son to the door. Hank had told him nothing of his troubles, yet his father saw that he had lost flesh, that he had not a prosperous air, and he acutely guessed that all was not going well with him. He would find out from the young girl, and with a sigh he settled back in his chair.

"I'll try to come home soon again, father," said Hank, dispiritedly, as he looked over his shoulder before closing the bedroom door, and he was just shrugging his shoulders at the promise, when something dark and panting caught at him in the unlighted kitchen, and made him jump.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was 'Tilda Jane, breathing like a race-horse.

"What's up with you, sissy?" he asked.

She could not speak for a few seconds, then she gasped with difficulty, "Hank, dear old Hank, he's in there — the loveliest man — he's always ready to do a turn for any one — go in — tell him your business. I've said a little, mind what he tells you, an' you'll get on. He's helped lots of people. He was in the midst of a dinner party. He's so good — he jus' left it an' come. Go —" and she gave him a gentle push and sent him into the parlour, where he blinked his eyes alternately at the lamp on the table, and at a small, dark, quiet man who sat with his hat on his knee.

The small man was breathing hard, as if he, too, had been walking fast, but on seeing Hank, he rose and stood with outstretched hand.

"My name is Tracy," he said, kindly, "and I have come to this town since you left it, but I know your family."

"I know you, too," said Hank, bluntly, "from her letters," and he jerked his head backward, but 'Tilda Jane, after softly closing the door, had disappeared.

Mr. Tracy sat down again, and Hank sat opposite him. A slight and awkward pause ensued, broken speedily, however, by the minister.

"Young man, you are in trouble."

"Yes, I am that," said Hank, gruffly.

"State your trouble," said the minister, kindly.

Hank hesitated an instant, then his words came with a rush. "You've visited creameries, sir?"

"I have."

"Well, there's good creameries and bad creameries. A few years ago, when I was casting about in my mind for something to do, I got in with a Chicago firm known as the White Elephant firm — owing to so many States being spotted with their buildings, loaded on the farmers, and costing too much to keep up. Being a Maine man, they sent

me to my own State. I was one of their most go-ahead sharks, now they've fired me to fix themselves right with the farmers. Do you know how they take in a community, sir?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, s'pose you're a shark. You navigate round among the farmers, and make a smother of big talk about hauling in buckets full of money. You get a committee to visit some creamery where the outfit is salted to make an extra showing. You pay the farmers' expenses, you offer 'em a block of stock, and up goes the creamery in their district with machinery from the promoting company, costing two or three times over what everything is worth. When the whole thing's up, it'll usually dawn on the minds of your stockholders that a creamery ain't much without cows, and their cows ain't got enough milk to pay for the fuel they burn. 'Way back here fifty miles, I had whipped up a creamery; I had a man to run the machinery, but he was a simpleton. He ruined the separator, it had to be sent back to the shop, an' I got mad with him.

"Then he blabbed, told everything he knew, an' a lot he didn't, an' the farmers stopped counting their cows long enough to listen. Hasty words flew round, about fraudulent subscriptions, vitiated transactions, no contracts, ruined farms, going to law — an' I thought it was time to skip. The firm had made me stop there up to this, an' as soon as I ran, they bounced me — I'm all played out here, sir. My native State bids me farewell!"

Hank suddenly ceased speaking, his head dropped on his breast, yet before it did so, he shot one appealing, hopeful glance at his listener. Despite his "don't-care" tone, and off-hand manner, it was plainly to be seen that he felt himself in trouble, and knew that there was one at hand who would help him.

"You've been in a poor business," observed Mr. Tracy, quietly. "You want to quit it?"

"Yes, sir," said Hank, meekly.

"Listen then —" and his companion in his turn began to speak rapidly.

'Tilda Jane, flying about the house, sent many an anxious thought to the closed parlour. What was

the minister saying to Hank? Would Hank talk to him freely?

"O Lord! Lord! Lord!" she cried, suddenly stopping and raising her clasped hands to the ceiling, "do make his heart soft — soft as mush, an' don't let him be sassy. The minister is smooth an' nice, an' he would stand sass, but it's awful bad for Hank. He's got to sober down. O Lord, make him solemn — jus' like an owl!"

She dashed a tear from the corner of her eye, and went on with her occupation of wrapping various articles in a red handkerchief.

When the parlour door opened, she ran to the front hall, and as Mr. Tracy passed her, she caught his hand and pressed it fervently.

He said nothing, but smiling with the more than earthly sweetness of one who truly loved his fellow men, he hurried back to his deserted guests.

Hank followed close at his heels, and as he stood in the hall doorway, looking already straighter and taller, he smiled patronisingly down at 'Tilda Jane.

"You're a mighty fine girl, sissy, how old are you now?"

"Thirteen o'clock las' week — struck fourteen this — oh, what did the minister say?"

Hank thumped his chest. "He's got me a situation, sissy, — a situation that means bread and butter for you and father, and maybe cake and jam."

The little girl locked her hands in intense excitement. "Where, Hank, oh, where?"

"Here, sissy."

"In Ciscasset?"

"Yes."

'Tilda Jane suppressed a scream. "An' you can live at home?"

"Well, I rather guess so."

'Tilda Jane's pleasure was too deep for words. She stood gaping speechlessly at him.

Hank, in high good humour, beamed benevolently on the orphan girl as she stood beside him. "What are you sticking your head up an down for like a chicken taking a drink?" he said at last.

"Hank, I'm givin' thanks," she said, reverently, "givin' thanks that you've got led out of that roguey business."

"I'll not get into anything of that kind again,

sissy," he said, with a shamefaced air. "You may just be sure of that. I've had a great talk with that friend of yours — and sissy, I'm obliged to you."

There was a queer break in his voice. An end had suddenly come to his troubles. He would now be in the way of earning an honest living. And it would be a pleasure to live with his father and this young girl who would look up to him and admire him.

"Sissy," he said, abruptly, "where do you think my new berth is?"

"I don't know — oh, tell me quick."

"In the Waysmith lumber mill. Mr. Waysmith offered a place to your friend Tracy to-day for some young man, and I'm the young man."

"With the Waysmiths?" murmured 'Tilda Jane, "where your father used to be?"

"The same, sissy."

'Tilda Jane could stand no more. "O Lord, I thank thee!" she cried, with a burst of tears, and running into the kitchen, she buried her face in the roller towel hanging on a door.

Hank sauntered after her, and on his way stumbled

over a bundle done up in a spotted red handkerchief. He stooped down, picked it up, and opened it. It contained a few lumps of sugar, a Bible, a pair of socks, two handkerchiefs, half a loaf of cake, and fifty cents wrapped in a piece of newspaper.

"My travelling kit," he murmured; "well, if she ain't the best little creature!"

"Hello, 'Tilda!" he called out; "stop that whimpering, and come and tell grampa the news."

The little girl hastily dried her face on the towel, and ran into the bedroom where grampa sat surveying them in bewilderment from the edge of his bed. Some time ago he had come to his room with the intention of undressing. His son's visit had upset him, and he had been sitting confusedly listening to the scraps of conversation he caught from different parts of the house.

"Grampa, grampa!" cried 'Tilda Jane, running in, and excitedly waving her hands, "Hank's goin' to live at home with you, an' me, an' the dogs. We'll be a real family. Oh, ain't it lovely, ain't it lovely?" and catching hold of her skirts she began a sidling and peculiar dance about the room.

Hank laughed till the tears came into his eyes. 'Tilda Jane was good, but she was not graceful. Then his merriment over, he began to yawn, and 'Tilda Jane, as keen of observation as ever, immediately espied this sign of fatigue.

She caught up Gippie, who alone showed no pleasure at the prospect of having another inmate of the house, and danced out to the kitchen.

"Come out, grampa dear," she called, "we'll all have a good supper, 'cause this is a most joyful 'casion."

As grampa started to limp out to the kitchen, Hank quietly placed himself by his side.

The old man looked at him. "I'm not sorry you're going to stay," he remarked, gruffly. "They say there's no place like home."

"You'd better believe that's true, father," said Hank, warmly; "a fellow gets sick of hotels and boarding-houses. We'll have some more funds now that I'm going to get at some decent kind of work. You mustn't bother your head about expenses."

The old man sank into his chair with a sigh of relief. His face was working strangely. Last year

at this time he was alone and miserable in a cheerless house. Now his son was with him, a brisk young girl was flying about his kitchen, a bright fire burned in the stove, a fire that was not unpleasantly warm to his aged limbs even on this summer night. A white cloth covered his formerly bare and uninviting table; he was going to have pie, and coffee, and toast and cake for supper, — surely the coming of this orphan had been a fortunate thing for him, and he slowly chafed his hands as he gazed at the glowing bed of coals.

Hank was following 'Tilda Jane from kitchen to pantry, and from pantry to kitchen.

"You're getting to be a great housekeeper," he said, admiringly; "but we must not forget the schooling. It's a great thing to be educated. You can't hold your own in this world unless you know something. You wrote me Mrs. Tracy was teaching you some, didn't you?"

'Tilda Jane paused as she filled a sugar-bowl.

"Yes, three evenin's a week. She's a boss — I mean a good teacher. I learned some at the 'sylum, — no, the asylum, when I warn't — no, when I

werent' — no, when I wasn't in the kitchen. And grampa talks to me some. He's a fine scholar."

"That's good — get all you can; but three evenings a week ain't enough. As soon as I can compass it, I'll have some one to take care of father daytimes, and let you go to school."

"To school!" said the little girl, "to learn more — to know how to speak proper! Oh, oh, I'm mos' too happy to live! Hank Dillson, I think you're the mos' beautiful man that was ever made!" and, dropping her sugar-bowl on the shelf, she seized a hand of the ex-creamery shark, and warmly pressed it between her little lean palms.

Hank, in some embarrassment, murmured, "Oh, fudge, I'm not as good as the next one."

"You're a million times better!" exclaimed 'Tilda Jane. "Oh, what a glad man Mr. Waysmith will be to have you in his mill! Come now, let's have supper. Dear ole grampa mus' get to bed. You wouldn't like to kill him with joy the first night you're home."

A few minutes later 'Tilda Jane was beaming behind the big coffee-pot. At last she had become

a member of a really happy family. Her dogs were stretched luxuriously on their rag mat by the stove, Grampa, calm and quiet, was sipping his coffee, and listening to some of Hank's travelling adventures.

She could not contain her delight. Her heart was too full, and presently she burst into low, irrepressible laughter.

Her companions stopped talking and stared at her.

"Oh, I can't help it!" she exclaimed, wildly, "I feel as if I'd come through a big sea of troubles to reach the promised land! I'm crazy — I'm crazy!" and too excited to keep still she pushed her chair aside, and rocked back and forth on her feet.

She saw stretching before her a long vista of happy years — the sight was almost too much for her, yet even in her ecstasy she thought of other children less fortunate.

"Hank, brother Hank!" she called suddenly, "the Tracys say to pass on blessings. All the world ain't joyful like us. When you make a little money will you let me write to the lady-boards for

another orphan, — the ugliest little orphan they've got, — worse than me, if it's not unpossible."

"You just write it down that I will," said Hank, gazing kindly and benevolently at her flushed face.

"We'll do it," cried 'Tilda Jane. "We'll be good to that other orphan. I know they'll have one, but how can I wait? What shall I do? I mus' hug some one, I'm so happy!"

She flashed a glance at the dogs. They were sleepy and comfortable. "Grampa, I guess it'll have to be you," she said, gaily, and, running to the old man, she threw her arms around his wrinkled neck, kissed his bald head, and fulfilled her promise of a hugging so vigorously that at last he called for mercy.

"Now, I'll go take something," she said, demurely, and, with a last caress, "you darlin' ole grampa — I could eat you — Lord, give me a thankful heart for all these mercies," then, reverently bending her head over her plate, she took up her knife and fork with a long and happy sigh.

THE END.

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